

**MIRANDA LAMBERT IN
PERFECT "HARMONY"**

**BABY ON BOARD FOR
THOMPSON SQUARE**

**NASH ARTIST SPOTLIGHT
NEXT JOSH THOMPSON**

NASH Country Weekly

COUNTRY FOR LIFE | OCTOBER 12, 2015

**YOU
VOTED!
COUNTRY'S
10 HOTTEST
SINGLE LADIES
INSIDE**



**Vince
Gill**

GRAND OLE OPRY TURNS 90

**TRACE ADKINS,
CARRIE UNDERWOOD,
DIERKS BENTLEY AND
OTHERS CELEBRATE A
MILESTONE BIRTHDAY
FOR COUNTRY'S
MOST HALLOWED
INSTITUTION**



**Carrie
Underwood**



**Martina
McBride**



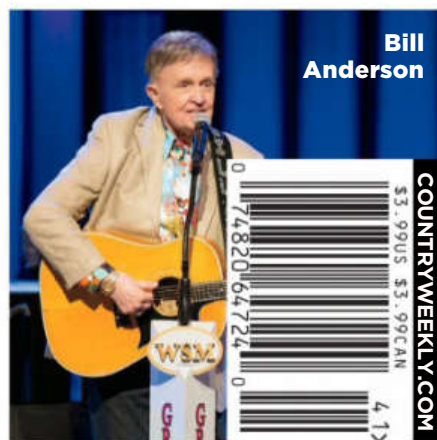
**Brad
Paisley
and Marty
Stuart**



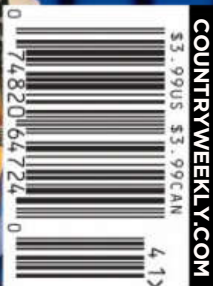
**Craig
Morgan**



**Little
Jimmy
Dickens**



**Bill
Anderson**



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Giving Their All

KEITH URBAN and **VINCE GILL** rounded up a wealth of talent for their fund-raising concert, *We're All for the Hall*, the night of Oct. 5, 2010, at Nashville's Bridgestone Arena. The two superstars welcomed a lineup that ranged from current hitmakers like **MIRANDA LAMBERT**, **ALAN JACKSON** and **BILLY CURRINGTON** to such legacy artists as **CHARLEY PRIDE** to help raise funds for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. As Keith told *Country Weekly* after the show, concerts like *We're All for the Hall* provide once-in-a-lifetime thrills for the audience. "The great thing about live performances is that sometimes something happens, and if you were there you saw it, and if you weren't, it's gone, it wasn't documented," Keith noted. "I find that really magical." Keith added that playing guitar behind one of his heroes, Charley Pride, proved a "surreal" experience. The all-star concert raised more than \$450,000 for the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum in Nashville.

Keith & Vince by Rick Diamond/CNHOF; Moe & Bill courtesy Webster PR

2015

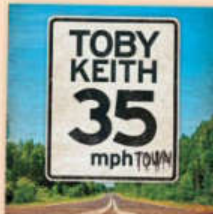
OCT. 9
31 FLAVORS

JANA KRAMER releases her sophomore album, *Thirty One* (owing to her current age), on Oct. 9 to stores and online retailers. For more on Jana and *Thirty One*, which will include her single "I Got the Boy," check out the Nash Next feature on page 27.



OCT. 9
TOBY DRIVES 35

The much-awaited new album from **TOBY KEITH**, *35 MPH Town*, arrives in stores Oct. 9. You'll hear a variety of influences and styles on the collection, including the breezy island sounds of "Rum Is the Reason," which Toby recently played on *Late Night With Stephen Colbert*. Look for our cover story with Toby in the Oct. 19 issue of *Nash Country Weekly*.



OCT. 10
DINER MITE

BILL ANDERSON fills in for the still-recovering Larry Black to host the Oct. 10 edition of *Larry's Country Diner* on RFD-TV. Whisperin' Bill's special guest is the always-solid **MOE BANDY**.



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October 12, 2015



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Art imitates life in the rising star's latest video, "Love and Rock 'n' Roll."

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40 On the Cover

The Grand Ole Opry is "home" to stars ranging from longtime members like Vince Gill and Connie Smith to recent inductees like Little Big Town. As the venerable radio show celebrates its 90th birthday, we look back on some of the Opry's memorable moments.

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PLUS!



27 JOSH THOMPSON

has some new music on the table with real-life songs about relationships and other timely topics.




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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Nash Country Weekly's **2015 Reader Survey!**

Everyone who completes the survey will be automatically entered in a drawing to win a trip for two to Nashville to attend the CMA Awards on Nov. 4, 2015.



WEDNESDAY NOV 4 8|7c 

To get started, visit countryweekly.com/readersurvey



FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

Ninety years is quite a milestone for anyone. This year the Grand Ole Opry is turning the big 9-0. We want to wish them a very happy birthday! We know they have been celebrating all year, but on Oct. 2 and 3 there will be a special Opry birthday bash with country's biggest stars on hand to honor this legendary institution—and *Nash Country Weekly* will be there. For this issue, we chose to take a look back at the 90 years that have made the Opry what it is.

Every country artist dreams of playing the historic show, and many have realized that dream. Come learn about the rich history of the Opry as we take a look at its 90 years in our salute to country's longest-running show. This week's Nash Next section catches up with "Beer on the Table" singer Josh Thompson. Josh, following his private office performance for our staff, sat down with *Nash Country Weekly* to talk about his lost album. You'll understand what I mean by "lost" when you check out the story on page 27.

We are also bringing you the second part of our four-part series on the Oak Ridge Boys. This week we get down to business with Duane Allen, who runs the Oaks' company and keeps the fellas on track. He took us to their offices to talk about his duties and how he keeps the big Oak Ridge machine running smoothly. Next week we'll bring you part three in our series as we showcase the photographic and artistic talents of William Lee Golden.

Don't miss next week's issue, on stands Oct. 12, as we talk to Toby Keith about his new album, family and being a grandfather.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!

LISA KONICKI, EDITOR IN CHIEF

FROM THE READER



Shoot us an email, a comment or a tweet and let us know what you think!

Letters, Nash Country Weekly, 506 2nd. Ave. South, Suite 200, Nashville, TN 37210

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Please include your name, address and daytime phone number with all correspondence. Nash Country Weekly assumes no responsibility for returning unsolicited material, including, but not limited to, photographs, artwork, manuscripts and letters. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

REMEMBERING LYNN

I am so sorry to hear of the passing of Lynn Anderson. During the '70s I was her biggest fan. I have more than 30 of her albums. I also knew a customer

of mine whose husband worked for Columbia Records and knew Lynn personally. May she rest in peace in the Rose Garden in heaven.

BARBARA VALERIUS | Brooksville, Fla.

URBAN APPEAL

I love country music and this magazine. I am the No. 1 fan of Keith Urban. He is so good-hearted, plus humble and an excellent guitar player and songwriter. He puts on an unbelievable performance. Why is he not getting more recognition? He does deserve it! God bless the Keith Urban family.

KELLIE DUNN | Evans, Ind.

FACEBOOK

I do love this song ["Raise 'em Up"]!! It is so wonderful to see/hear Keith Urban transition to family music once in a while. It makes me appreciate his depth and versatility.

BECKY STUHLINGER

Congrats to The Mavericks! Love them!
DIANE FRAFJORD

Kindest regards Ray Scott [and] a beautiful and happy life with your wife!
JC COUNTRYSOIXANTE

A girl for Jana Kramer and a boy for Thompson Square. Congrats to all of you.

KRISTINA STURGELL

TWITTER

y'all—check it out, the queen of the country rap game [Sarah Ross] featured in @countryweekly!!

SLIM PICKINZ | @slimpickinzent

@ScottyMcCreery @countryweekly @ClareDunnMusic I saw the pics—great spread!! You certainly could be a model but I kinda love your singing!
MARY GRACE | @mmmtx1

CORRECTIONS

In our Sept. 21 cover story ["2015 Fall Preview"] we incorrectly stated that Dolly Parton's TV movie *Coat of Many Colors* is airing on Dec. 3. In fact, the movie will air on Dec. 10 at 9 p.m. ET on NBC.

In our Sept. 28 cover story ["Stay Gold"] we incorrectly listed Loretta Lynn's first released single as "I'm a Country Girl." The correct title is "I'm a Honky Tonk Girl."

NCW regrets the errors.

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**NASH Country
Weekly**

COUNTRY FOR LIFE

FIRST TAKE

CAN'T FIGHT THIS FEELING

It was a night of big hair and big fun as REO Speedwagon teamed with Sara Evans for a CMT Crossroads performance in Franklin, Tenn.





THE COUNTRY BREW

A SWEET TASTE OF ALL THINGS COUNTRY

Opening Act



SOMETHING NOT FREE

With a new *Billboard* No. 1 album, *Something More Than Free*, under his belt, Americana stalwart **JASON ISBELL** will take his talents to Nashville's Ryman Auditorium for four sold-out shows Oct. 23-26. Jason's wife, Amanda Shires, will open the show on the first night, while the following nights will feature openers Parker Millsap, Hurray for the Riff Raff and Chris Stapleton, respectively.

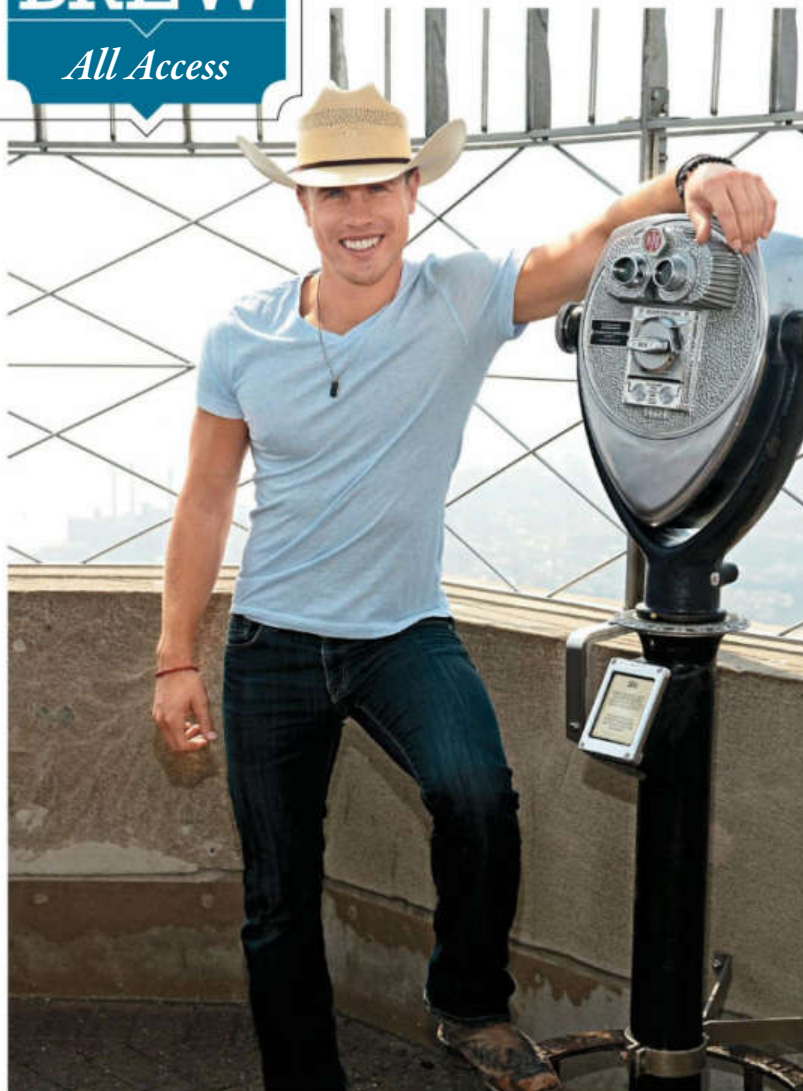




(Left) **LOBSTER MEAT** Blake Shelton (right) and Carson Daly get caught up in the moment at a press junket and clam-bake for the new season of *The Voice*; (below) **L'EGO MY EGO** When you're part of a trio like Neil of The Band Perry, you check your ego at the curb.



(Above) **CHASIN' THAT NEON RAINBOW** Chase Bryant plays a set outside the Ryman Auditorium as part of the Opry Circle Throwdown; (left) **SURVEY SAYS** Steve Harvey and the FGL boys are always the top answer on the board.



(Above) **THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK** Dustin Lynch proves that King Kong ain't got nothing on him at NYC's Empire State Building; (right) **CRYSTAL BALLER** In his spare time, Steven Tyler (left) likes to read the fortunes of guys like Zac Brown.



(Above) **KISSED OFF** Garth Brooks' kiss is still strong enough to make Trisha Yearwood weak at the knees during her Music City Walk of Fame induction.



(Left) **SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE** When Carrie Underwood (left) and Kelsea Ballerini smile, the whole world smiles with them; (above) **RING-A-LING** "Southern Belle" singer Scotty McCreery meets a couple of real belles in Deborah Allen (left) and Pam Tillis.

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Surprise, Surprise

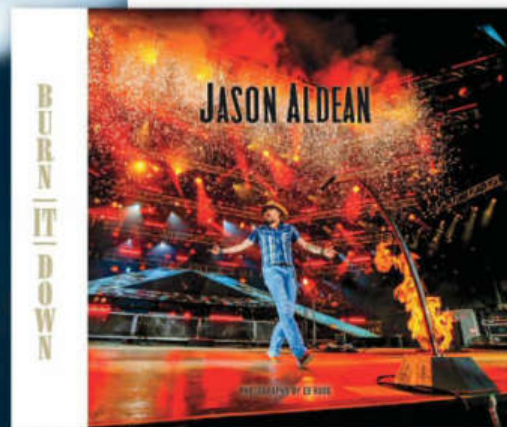
HUNTER HAYES performed a surprise pop-up concert in Lexington, Ky., as part of the *CMT Instant Jam* series on Sept. 9, which also happened to be his birthday. The 24-year-old artist sang a number of hits for the packed crowd at Cosmic Charlie's, including "I Want Crazy," "21" and "Storm Warning." Hunter was also presented with a surprise birthday present: a personalized University of Kentucky basketball jersey.







BURN: THE BOOK



It's the souvenir to end all souvenirs. Whether you did or didn't make it to one of **JASON ALDEAN**'s Burn It Down Tour stops, you can get a better idea of what it takes to make one of the hottest shows in country music happen with the Jason Aldean *Burn It Down* photo book. Filled with 72 incredible, never-before-seen pictures taken by celebrity photographer Ed Rode, the book takes fans up close and personal on stages, behind the scenes, on the road and at award shows with Jason, his band and crew as they cross the country on the Burn It Down Tour.

Jason by John Russell/ChA; Hunter by Ray Burmiston/EB Media; Miranda by Ahmad Elatab/Corbis; Martina by Daniel DeSlover/Corbis; Kelly by Lana Olive/Corbis; boots: courtesy Dierks Bentley Twitter

T FOR T-SHIRT, T FOR TECHNOLOGY

A self-professed tech geek, **HUNTER HAYES** is tapping into all-new technology to bring his fans even more content, along with a special contest during his upcoming 21 Tour. Hunter is working with Shazam to create a "Shazamable" T-shirt. Utilizing the company's new visual search technology, paired with an app, users can access a playlist of Hunter's songs and register to win a trip to see him on the road this fall. Stay tuned!





DARN TWEETIN'

Follow *Nash Country Weekly* on Twitter @countryweekly

It's a beautiful day in the hill country, friends. Love your people.

Randy Rogers Band
@rrbchoir

Killed that workout, now bout to slay business. All while staying heathy, and positive. Uplift people. You gotta have a purpose for all of it.

Brooke Hogan
@MizzHogan

That new Johnny Cash documentary American Rebel is awesome! Check it if you haven't seen it

Brian Kelley
@PlayBkPlay

ALL crazy active shooters.... should be actively SHOT as soon as possible.... When the LOON RISES... Be vigilant.. Be prepared!!!

Joe Bonsall
@joebonsall

Love bein home and spending this pretty day with my wife,,, @JenJenB1

Eddie Montgomery
@LuckymanEddie

short retirement for my boots! had to bring them back out for this! thanks @taylorswift13. killer show. the best.

Dierks Bentley
@DierksBentley



MIRANDA IN HARMONY

MIRANDA LAMBERT will be adding to her list of accomplishments as she's set to receive the 2015 Harmony Award from the Nashville Symphony on Dec. 12. Miranda will be honored at the 31st annual Symphony Ball at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center in Nashville, where she'll also perform a few selections with the award-winning Nashville Symphony orchestra.

The Harmony Award is given to an individual who exemplifies the harmonious spirit of Nashville's music community. "I have always felt that music is universal no matter what genre," Miranda notes, "and being recognized by the Nashville Symphony as a Harmony Award recipient is an honor. And the icing on the cake is I get to perform a few of my songs with the Symphony orchestra."



ROOMS TO ROCK

Musicians On Call, the nonprofit organization that brings music to the bedsides of patients in health-care facilities (and a friend to *Nash Country Weekly*),



has announced its first-ever Rock the Room Tour. The four-city trek, which gets underway on Oct. 21 at Nashville's City Winery, aims to raise awareness of the im-

impact of music on healing and raise money for the cause. At the first Rock the Room show, **MARTINA**

McBRIDE and **KELLY CLARKSON** are slated to give special performances, while Reba McEntire will be making a special appearance. Additionally, the Nashville event will honor MOC supporter (and former NCW contributor) Shane Tarleton with a "Golden Ukulele" for the Leadership in Music Award.

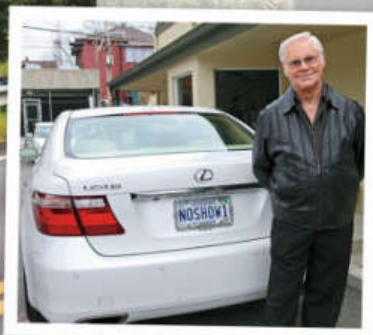


POSSUM'S PAVEMENT

Some of **GEORGE JONES'** most legendary and life-threatening moments were either behind the wheel of an automobile or, as the story goes, on a riding lawn mower. Now, a portion of Tennessee State Route 96, which runs through

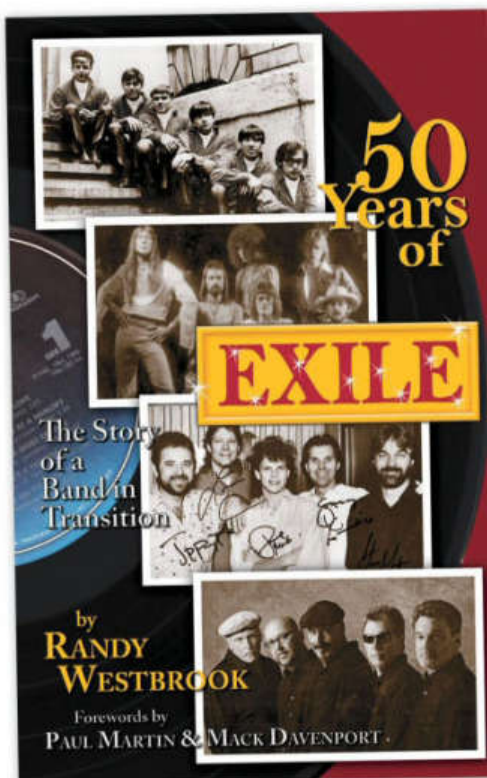
Williamson County where George lived until his death, has been renamed the George Jones Memorial Highway in his honor. **NANCY JONES**, George's widow, was on hand for the dedication. Additionally,

Williamson County Mayor Rogers Anderson declared Sept. 10 George Jones Day.



EXILE BETWEEN THE PAGES

Hard to believe, but the band **EXILE** has been around for more than 50 years. The group, led by co-founder J.P. Pennington, formed in high school in the 1960s and has remained intact, though with several personnel changes, over time. Now, a new book chronicling the life story of the country/rock stalwarts, **50 YEARS OF EXILE: THE STORY OF A BAND IN TRANSITION**, is available for fans at retail and online outlets. The book follows the rise of the band through the decades and contains anecdotes from many of Exile's current and former members. Exile scored a major hit on the pop charts with "Kiss You All Over" in 1978 but found lasting success in the country field, racking up 10 No. 1 singles, including "Give Me One More Chance," "Crazy for Your Love" and "I Can't Get Close Enough," in the 1980s.



BIRTHDAYS

OCT. 6, 1966
TIM RUSHLOW

OCT. 7, 1949
KIERAN KANE of The O'Kanes

OCT. 8, 1953
RICKY LEE PHELPS
of The Kentucky Headhunters

OCT. 9, 1993
SCOTTY McCREERY

OCT. 10, 1946
JOHN PRINE

OCT. 10, 1958
TANYA TUCKER

OCT. 11, 1943
GENE WATSON

OCT. 11, 1953
PAULETTE CARLSON
of Highway 101

ON TOUR CANAAN SMITH | STOMPIN' GROUNDS TOUR

NOV. 6
Charlotte, N.C.
Coyote Joe's

NOV. 12
Nashville
Exit/In

NOV. 13
Greenville, S.C.
Blind Horse
Saloon

NOV. 14
Winston-Salem, N.C.
Johnny &
June's

Ultra Saloon

NOV. 19
Wichita Falls, Texas
Denim &
Diamonds

NOV. 20
Lubbock, Texas
Wild West

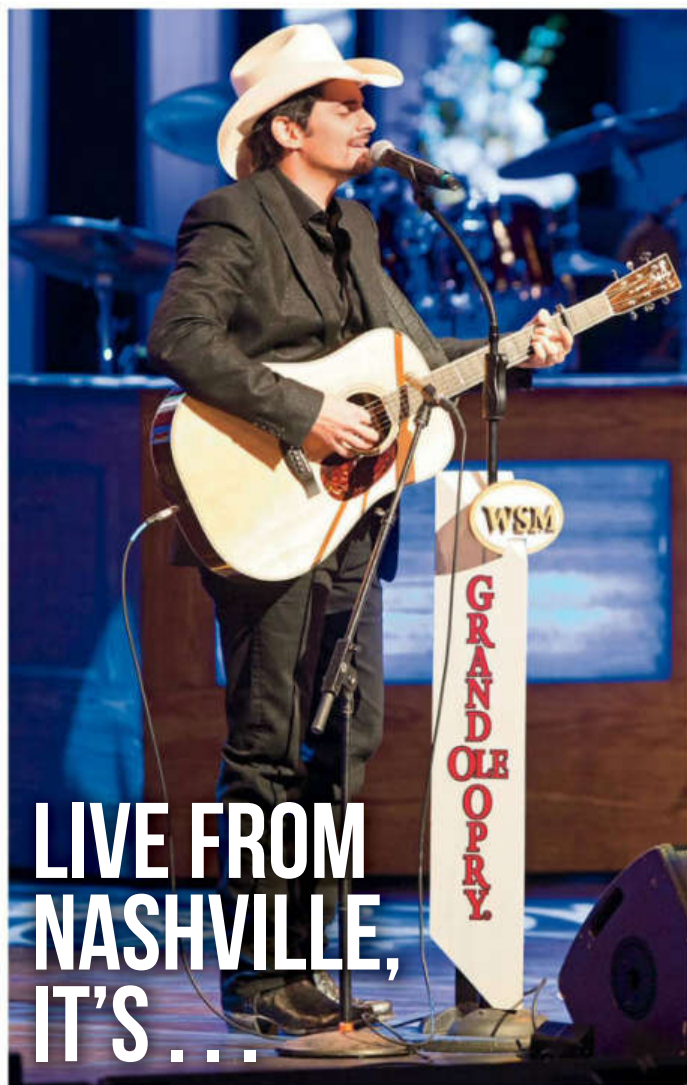
NOV. 21
Lawton, Okla.
C.W.
Scooters

DEC. 3
Springfield, Ill.
Boondocks

DEC. 4
Chicago
Joe's Sports Bar

DEC. 5
Rootstown, Ohio
Dusty Armadillo

DEC. 11
Little Rock, Ark.
Revolution Music
Room



**LIVE FROM
NASHVILLE,
IT'S ...**

BRAD PAISLEY, BLAKE SHELTON, DARIUS RUCKER, THE BAND PERRY and BRETT ELDRIDGE are heading to the silver screen this winter. A documentary concert film titled *American Saturday Night: Live From the Grand Ole Opry* will showcase the country stars as they perform on the Opry stage as well as featuring backstage footage and a few surprises. It's all part of the Grand Ole Opry's 90th birthday celebration.

ALBUM RELEASES

LOCKED & LOADED

BLAKE SHELTON is parlaying his recent 20th No. 1 hit into a new album, *Reloaded: 20 #1 Hits*, which will feature a score of his chart-toppers as well as his current single, "Gonna." The new album will drop on Oct. 23, and by that time, "Gonna" may be his 21st No. 1.



CAN HE DUET?

T.G. SHEPPARD finally got the chance to record his dream album of duet collaborations and the result, *T.G. Sheppard: Legendary Friends & Country Duets*, will be released on Oct. 30. T.G. performs with some of the most influential artists of all time, including **MERLE HAGGARD, JERRY LEE LEWIS, THE OAK RIDGE BOYS** and **WILLIE NELSON** for the project. Plus, T.G.'s wife, Kelly Lang, joins him for a duet on "Dead Girl Walking."



MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD

A staple of the Texas Country music scene for more than a decade, **RANDY ROGERS BAND** will be releasing a new album, *Nothing Shines Like Neon*, on Jan. 15, 2016.

The Buddy Cannon-produced offering features duets with Alison Krauss, Jamey Johnson and Texas legend Jerry Jeff Walker.



Metal Head

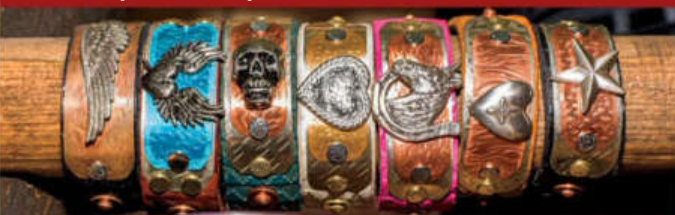
BRUNNER'S METALWEAR has been featured in wardrobes for TV shows like ABC's *Nashville* and the A&E reality series *Crazy Hearts*. Recognized for its detailed style, high quality and craftsmanship, Brunner's metalwear can be seen on performers like **BRANTLEY GILBERT**, **JOE NICHOLS**, **CRAIG MORGAN**, **GWEN SEBASTIAN**, **CRAIG WAYNE BOYD**, members of **AEROSMITH** and other celebs. A songwriter and musician himself, George Brunner Boettcher designs and handcrafts his unique cuffs, necklaces and belt buckles with entertainers in mind. George's line of rock 'n' roll-inspired pieces can be purchased online at brunnersmetalwear.com or in Nashville at the Five & Tenn store inside the city's elegant Omni Hotel.



George uses a mix of metals and colors to create unique pieces that combine his own country sensibilities and rock 'n' roll style for items that are as much conversation pieces as they are accessories.



George handcrafts each item in his home workshop, which guarantees that each cuff, necklace, belt buckle or watch, while sharing common design features, is nonetheless a one-of-a-kind creation. George can also custom-design an item to suit your personal tastes and desires. Go to George's website to find your inspiration.





10 POINT BUCK

MEN'S CAMO HOODIE

10-POINT BUCK
EMBLAZONED ON BACK
FEATURES AL AGNEW'S
ART IN A CUSTOM
CAMOUFLAGE DESIGN



Back

Front

CONTRASTING CAMO-PRINT BY
AL AGNEW ON SLEEVES,
HOOD LINING AND BACK APPLIQUÉ

READY FOR YOUR NEXT WILDERNESS ADVENTURE

A one-on-one encounter with the regal woodland king known as the American Whitetail is an experience that avid sportsmen never forget. Now, you can wrap yourself in that wilderness adventure wherever you go with our "10-Point Buck" Men's Camo Hoodie, featuring the work of acclaimed wildlife artist Al Agnew. Crafted in a black cotton-blend knit, our hoodie features a custom camo-print created from the work of Al Agnew on both the sleeves and the hood lining. A dramatic close-up portrait of a 10-point buck with the same camouflage artwork is captured on the back in appliqué, and the front of the hoodie showcases an embroidered 10-point buck. This versatile hoodie has two front pockets, rib knit cuffs and hem, and metal toggles on the cords... perfect for year-round comfort. Imported.

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☐ **L (42-44)** 01-20391-012 ☐ **XXL (50-52)** 01-20391-014

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RECIPE FOR HEALTH

BREAST CANCER SURVIVOR **SHERYL CROW** SERVES UP A TIMELY TACO DISH FOR THIS SPECIAL MONTH.

In 2006, Sheryl Crow got the wake-up call for a healthier diet when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. While she was battling the cancer, Sheryl was introduced to chef Chuck White, who guided her on a course to better nutrition and healthier cooking. In the past, Sheryl, an admitted non-cook, tended to subsist on room service fare and on-the-go meals.

The two put their heads together and collaborated on a 2011 cookbook called *If It Makes You Healthy: More Than 100 Delicious Recipes Inspired by the Seasons*. The health-focused cookbook emphasizes good-for-you meals that also taste terrific, such as Sheryl's slow-cooked salsa chicken tacos.

As we celebrate Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, there's no better time to set out on that healthy diet. And here's a little help from breast cancer survivor Sheryl Crow herself. **BOB PAXMAN**



Sheryl courtesy WMN; tacos by Lisovskaya Natalia/Corbis

SHERYL CROW'S SLOW-COOKED SALSA CHICKEN TACOS

1 ½ cups chicken stock

1 ½ cups mild salsa

2 (8-ounce) skinless,
boneless chicken breasts

8 taco shells or
whole-wheat tortillas

(Sheryl recommends using all organic ingredients if possible)

2 cups shredded lettuce

1 cup diced tomatoes

1 cup shredded cheddar
or provolone cheese

4 tbsp. sour cream

In a large saucepan, bring stock and salsa to a simmer over medium heat. **ADD** the chicken and simmer covered, until tender, about 1 ½ hours. Remove from pan and cool. Reserve cooking liquid.

SHRED chicken and put it in a bowl. **DRIZZLE** with enough of the cooking liquid to keep the chicken moist.

FILL taco shells or tortillas with chicken and top with lettuce, tomatoes, cheese and sour cream.

THE THOMAS KINKADE
"All Hearts Come Home"
 Masterpiece Crystal
 Snowman


*Crystal and crimson
 will color your
 holidays bright!*



Musical!
 Plays a medley of 8 holiday
 favorites at the push
 of a button



It Lights Up!



**MULTI-FACETED
 GENUINE
 CRYSTAL**

 *A Market First! Brilliant silver-colored plating on the snowman's attire as well as on the cardinals' nest and tree adds a unique shimmer to this holiday treasure*

 *Hand-painted cardinal family brings a festive touch of holiday crimson to the happy scene*

 *A miniature Thomas Kinkadee holiday village nestles inside the crystal and illuminates from within*

Shown much smaller than actual
 size of about 9 inches tall.
 Operates on 3 AA batteries or an AC
 adapter (not included).

A newfound friendship warms the heart
 Perched in a frost-covered nest, mom and dad cardinal look on thankfully as a snowman neighbor returns their little one home. Few things brighten winter's chill more than cardinals, or the sight of a snowman ready to bring a smile to our face. Now these symbols of the season unite in a Masterpiece Edition inspired by the artistry of Thomas Kinkade. A snowman sculpture, an illuminated village and a faceted crystal piece enhanced with silvery plating, this first-of-a-kind edition celebrates the joys of togetherness.

**A Superb Value... Backed by an
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*Every delightful detail of
 the Thomas Kinkadee village
 and the cardinal family is
 carefully hand-painted*

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SEND NO MONEY NOW

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YES. Please reserve the Thomas Kinkadee "All Hearts Come Home" Masterpiece Crystal Snowman for me as described in this announcement.
 Limit: one per order.

Please Respond Promptly

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Mrs. Mr. Ms. _____

Name (Please Print Clearly)

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State _____

Zip _____

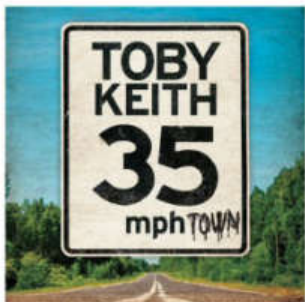
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Album

**Toby Keith***35 MPH Town*

SHOW DOG UNIVERSAL

B

There are several different iterations of Toby Keith who make an appearance on the Oklahoma native's new album, *35 MPH Town*.

In the album's lead single and first track, it's love-everybody Toby Keith, boozily proffering a message of acceptance and inclusion (except perhaps for 12-steppers) over an amiable, scuffed-up waltz. The album's title track, on the other hand, boasts some cool production tricks that bring to mind Coldplay, but the lyrics' nostalgia for an imagined past when people were somehow more safe makes Toby seem as if he's entered the "get off my lawn" stage of his career.

Thankfully, he doesn't dwell there long, letting his beach-bum side take over for a pair of tracks that totally embrace the oceanic influence of fellow entrepreneur and capital-

ist extraordinaire Jimmy Buffett. On "Rum Is the Reason," Toby spins a silly yarn about the way pirates (particularly modern ones) never make it to positions of power (see the title for answers), backed by the Coral Reefer Band for a bang-on interpretation of Jimmy's sound. Later, on "Sailboat for Sale," Jimmy stops by to help push the sad/funny narrative along.

For the most part, those are all fine and well. But

the most engaging version of Toby (for my money, anyway) is one of a couple classic archetypes: the swaggering, wisecracking galoot of "Good Gets Here" and "10 Foot Pole," both rocked-up boot-stompers that bring some tasty brass into the mix, or the sad-sack dudes at the center of "Haggard, Hank & Her" and "What She Left Behind." Toby's supple, caramel-tinged vocals are an ideal match for either, and he's not lost an

ounce of the power he had some 20 years ago when he got started.

But more than that, he inhabits the characters of those last two types of songs so believably that it's easy to imagine he's actually lived them.

LONG STORY SHORT:

Not all sides of Toby are created equal, but some of them are eternally enjoyable.

JON FREEMAN

THE NCW JUKEBOX

Essential songs
from our 10 Hottest
Bachelorettes.

**LAUREN
ALAINA**
"Georgia
Peaches"

**DANIELLE
BRADBERRY**
"The Heart
of Dixie"

**CASSADEE
POPE**
"I Am
Invincible"

**TERRI
CLARK**
"Girls Lie Too"

**LINDSAY
ELL**
"Trippin' on Us"

**KATIE
ARMIGER**
"Best Song Ever"

**KELSEA
BALLERINI**
"Love Me Like
You Mean It"

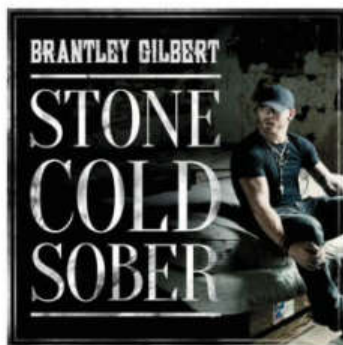
**KACEY
MUSGRAVES**
"Follow
Your Arrow"

RAELYNN
"God Made Girls"

**KRISTEN
KELLY**
"Ex-Old Man"

LOOK FOR THIS
NASH COUNTRY WEEKLY
PLAYLIST ON
rdio

Singles



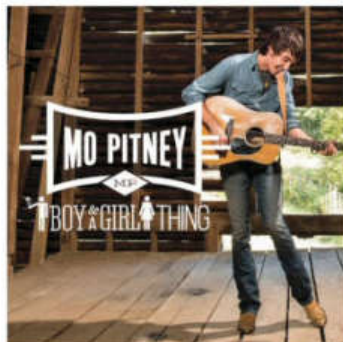
Brantley Gilbert "Stone Cold Sober"

THE VALORY MUSIC CO.

B+

At first blush, it doesn't sound like Brantley Gilbert is reinventing the wheel with his new single, "Stone Cold Sober." As this well-written ballad progresses, however, you start to realize that Brantley Gilbert has evolved into a mature and thoughtful songwriter whose expertise reaches far beyond the dirt roads and tailgates that were a hallmark of his initial entry into country music. Co-written with Brett James and Dan Layus, "Stone Cold Sober" tells the unique story of an intoxicated admission of love that ends without regret. Yes, without. And extra kudos go to Brantley for using the grit in his voice to reinforce that bourbon-soaked and cigarette-smoked confessional.

TAMMY RAGUSA



Mo Pitney "Boy & a Girl Thing"

CURB RECORDS

B+

He may only be 22 years old, but Illinois native Mo Pitney is an old soul—or at least an old-sounding soul. He's steeped in the classic country stylings of artists like Roger Miller, and you can hear some of Roger's "Dang Me" witticism in Mo's new single, "Boy & a Girl Thing," a cleverly written song about the evolution of a relationship. But what you hear most of all is Mo's suede-like vocals over the smooth-rolling production. It's a meat-and-potatoes song—void of any trimmings—from one of country music's most promising newcomers.

JIM CASEY



Granger Smith "Backroad Song"

WHEELHOUSE RECORDS/PIONEER MUSIC

B+

Banish the idea that this is yet another cookie-cutter banality about country roads, tailgating, beer fests and the other usual suspects. "Backroad Song" is a cut above the clutter in a couple of critical ways. First, the opening lines paint a descriptive picture of a country back road, with *Barbed wire fence / Carvin' out a hillside / Cuttin' holes in the midday sun* reading almost like the opening passage of a Southern novel. On the second count, Granger's warm, rich voice provides a nice complement to the lyrics. He has a style that's both laid-back and interesting at the same time, a rare double play for any artist. Thematically, of course, "Backroad Song" isn't high on originality, but it bubbles over with the brightness of a summer day.

BOB PAXMAN

WHO IS COUNTRY'S **VOTE NOW!** **SEXIEST** MAN?



**TRACE
ADKINS**



**JASON
ALDEAN**



**GARY
ALLAN**



**FRANKIE
BALLARD**



**DIERKS
BENTLEY**



**LEE
BRICE**



**ZAC
BROWN**



**LUKE
BRYAN**



**CHASE
BRYANT**



**KRISTIAN
BUSH**



**CRAIG
CAMPBELL**



**KENNY
CHESNEY**



**ERIC
CHURCH**



**EASTON
CORBIN**



**BILLY
CURRINGTON**



**JAY
DeMARCUS**



**BRETT
ELDRIDGE**



**TYLER
FARR**



**BRANTLEY
GILBERT**



**HUNTER
HAYES**



**DAVE
HAYWOOD**



**TYLER
HUBBARD**



**SAM
HUNT**



**ALAN
JACKSON**



**CHRIS
JANSON**



**TOBY
KEITH**



**BRIAN
KELLEY**



**CHARLES
KELLEY**



**GARY
LeVOX**



**DUSTIN
LYNCH**

Is it a thick crop of dark curls or a flowing, blond mane? Is it the shoulders of a linebacker or the angular physique of a swimmer? Is it a warm, welcoming smile or bright, sparkling eyes? Is it cool confidence or an ability to make you belly-laugh? What makes a man sexy? And which handsome country stars have those qualities? It's time for *you* to pick. *Nash Country Weekly* is asking you to vote for the sexiest men in country music. It's up to you because if we have to pick, we're going to choose them all.

GO TO COUNTRYWEEKLY.COM BEFORE OCT. 18 TO CAST YOUR VOTE.



**SCOTTY
McCREERY**



**TIM
McGRAW**



**JUSTIN
MOORE**



**KIP
MOORE**



**CRAIG
MORGAN**



**JOE
NICHOLS**



**JERROD
NIEMANN**



**JAKE
OWEN**



**BRAD
PAISLEY**



**ERIC
PASLAY**



**NEIL
PERRY**



**REID
PERRY**



**MICHAEL
RAY**



**THOMAS
RHETT**



**CHASE
RICE**



**JOE DON
ROONEY**



**DARIUS
RUCKER**



**BLAKE
SHELTON**



**CANAAN
SMITH**



**CHRIS
STAPLETON**



**GEORGE
STRAIT**



**PHILLIP
SWEET**



**COLE
SWINDELL**



**KEIFER
THOMPSON**



**JOSH
TURNER**



**KEITH
URBAN**



**JIMI
WESTBROOK**



**CHUCK
WICKS**



**DWIGHT
YOAKAM**



**CHRIS
YOUNG**

with The LACS

Country-rap duo The LACS is comprised of Clay Sharpe and Brian King, a pair of South Georgia fellows who write, sing and rap about their laid-back, fun-loving lives. Their latest album, *Outlaw in Me*, climbed to No. 3 on both the country and rap album charts. NCW talked with LACS member Clay, aka "Uncle Snap," about gummy bears, dirt-road therapy and following your heart.

MARIA DINOIA



Clay Sharpe (left) and Brian King

Looking back, what advice would you give to your 10-year-old self?

Follow your heart. If it's in your heart, you gotta go and do it no matter what anyone else says.

If you could do an interview with one person in the music industry, who would it be?

Hank Williams Jr.

What's the kindest thing someone has ever done for you?

Our fans send us some really cool stuff. Like this wood thing that has the LACS name on it that I know took them at least 20 hours to

make and spent a lot of time on.

What one decision in your life would you like to go back and change?

I would like not to get on the trampoline before I broke my leg!

Who is your favorite Disney character and why?

Woody from *Toy Story* 'cause he was always around.

Who is the one person you respect the most and why?

My mom. She always supported every decision I made about music no matter what.

What do you do to cheer yourself up when you feel sad?

I ride. Ride around. Listen to music. It's dirt-road therapy.

What's your favorite time of day?

In the summertime, it's later in the day when it starts to cool down and you can sit on the porch.

What word or phrase do you use the most?

Absolutely.

What's your favorite sundae topping?

Gummy bears. 'Cause I eat them alone, too.

NASH NEXT

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

photo by Kristin Barlowe/Monarch Publicity

JOSH THOMPSON
FILLS IN A MISSING
CHAPTER OF HIS
RECORDING CAREER
WITH A NEW RELEASE.

FOUND SOUNDS

BY TAMMY RAGUSA

Josh Thompson, in his typically droll way, refers to his new album as his “first second record that came out third.”

Make sense? No? OK, maybe he should explain.

“This is the record that I cut second that never came out, so the third record that I recorded, technically would be the second record that came out,” he says, explaining the fuzzy math behind the non-sequential release of his newest album, *Change: The Lost Record, Vol. 1*.

Josh released his debut album, *Way Out Here*, in 2010 and recorded a follow-up for RCA that was never released. Administrative changes at the record label resulted in downsizing, with artists being dropped from the roster. Josh was among the casualties, but he was fortunate enough to be given his finished album. “That’s not typical protocol,” he says, “but we got it and left with it and kind of put it in our back pocket for a rainy day.”

Josh gives the impression that he was less hurt and bitter about his relationship with RCA ending than he was disappointed that the album wasn’t being released. In an attempt to distance himself from those negative feelings, whatever they were, he put the project on indefinite hold even after he signed a new record deal. “I wanted to scrap it, hold onto it, whatever, and just start fresh and make a brand-new record,” he explains. “And I did, and this has been sitting around since 2011. I always



photo by Robb D. Cohen/Corbis

A close-up photograph of a person's hands playing an acoustic guitar. The guitar has a dark fretboard with white block inlays and a light-colored body with a decorative floral pickguard. A black microphone on a stand is positioned in front of the guitar. The background is dark and out of focus.

BOYS IN THE WOODS

Hunting season is almost upon us, which means avid outdoorsman Josh will be spending time with his family and in the woods.

"I couldn't be happier that it's getting colder outside," he says. "I've got all kinds of tree-stand time lined up. I'm going to Ohio for four days and then Missouri, then up to Wisconsin. I'm trying to hit all the ruts [bucks in search of does] in these places. This is all bow-hunting. And then back up to Wisconsin or Michigan, of course, intermittently hunting in Tennessee. Then Texas in January. I do have a couple of shows later in November, which are all, mind you, up around Wisconsin around Thanksgiving, which is gun season," he continues. "There's a method to my madness. There's nothing that I'm playing that late in the year that doesn't revolve around a place to hunt."

So, no big game like the monster elk Josh has been known to hunt?

Not this year. "I'm concentrating on whitetails and then next year I'll go elk hunting—elk or moose, I can't decide," he says. As it turned out, the last time Josh tried to go moose hunting didn't work out too well.

"I've been moose hunting one time—moose is like my dream animal, always has been," he says. "My buddy and I, right after high school, we saved up our money and went on a moose hunt in Canada, [in] Manitoba. And the week we got there, this was the last week in September, it was 80 degrees all week. It was a heat wave and it completely shut the rut down, 100 percent shut them down. So, we basically paid moose-hunting prices to go fishing. But fishing was great, don't get me wrong. And we partied like it was 1967, but no moose. Didn't even see one. We caught a lot of walleyes, a lot of big pike, a lot of buzzes."

WRITE YOU A SONG

YOU MIGHT RECOGNIZE
SOME OF THESE
TUNES FROM THE PEN
OF JOSH THOMPSON:

**"Church Pews
or Bar Stool"**

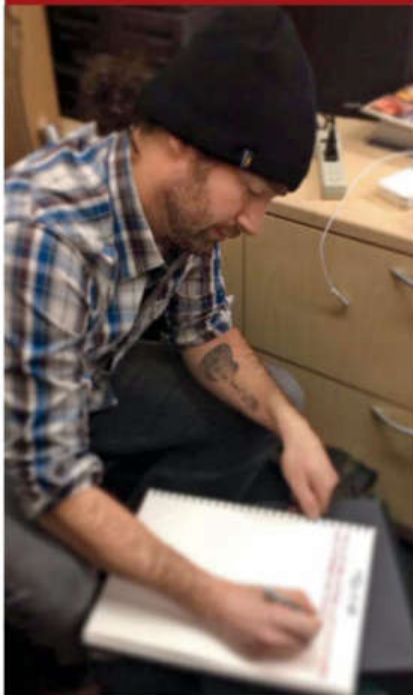
JASON ALDEAN
(from *My Kinda Party*)

**"A Man Don't
Have to Die"**

BRAD PAISLEY
(from *This Is
Country Music*)

"Thank a Farmer"
JAMES WESLEY

"Freaks Like Me"
JOE NICHOLS



Josh (right) and pal Justin Moore put their voices together in the duet "Livin' Like Hank" from Josh's new EP, but in 2012, they put their heads and guitars together to try a bit of tour bus co-writing.

"FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME, I'M HAPPIER THAN I'VE BEEN . . . I NEEDED A LITTLE CHANGE OF PACE."

had the intention of putting it out in some facet—EP, full record, whatever it is. Now is the perfect time."

But why? Why would Josh shelve one perfectly good album and record a completely different album? "Bad juju," he jokes.

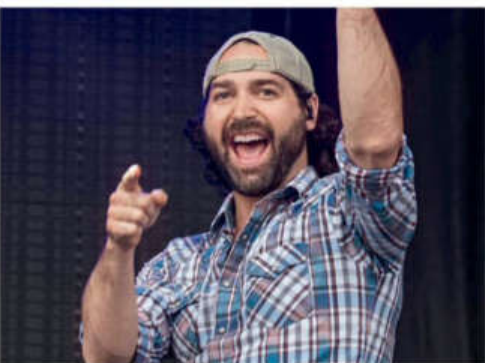
The "volume one" portion of the album's title is a hint—the original full-length album has been split into smaller EPs, with a second on the way soon. It has become fairly common practice among his fellow country artists—such as Sam Hunt and Cam—to release EPs before full-length albums. "I think that's kind of the way the industry is going," Josh muses. "With today's attention span, I don't know if records hold the weight that they once did. I think it's easier to digest."

Fans who may have felt that there was too much difference between Josh's *Way Out Here* debut and the follow-up, *Turn It Up*, may find a crucial link in *Change*. In Josh's estimation, it may "bridge the gap," he says,

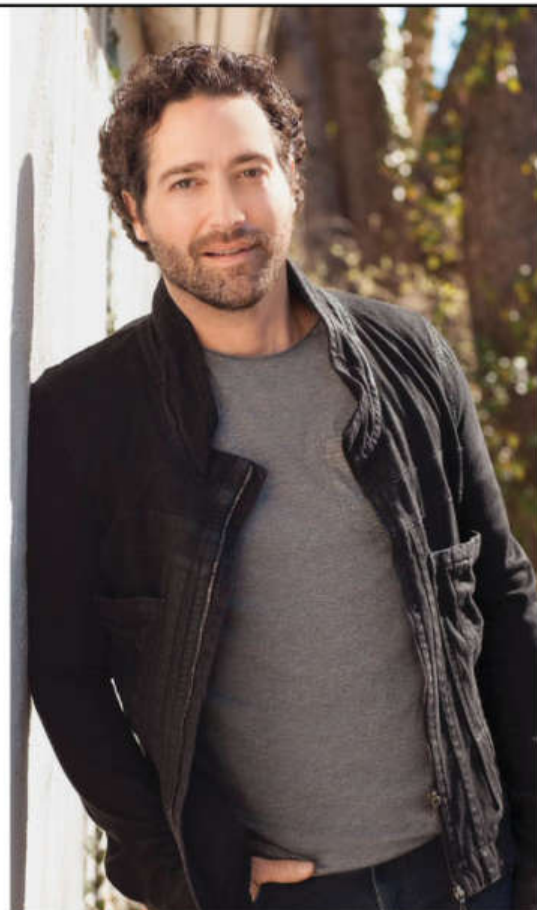
"because [fans are] missing a major piece. I think the lyrics and the production make a more seamless progression between [albums] one and three when you have all of them."

For those who may not have noticed any sonic or thematic shifts between Josh's albums, the arrival of *Change* simply means no more waiting for new music from the Wisconsin native. For Josh, it means a minute to catch his breath and consider his next move. "When this year started, there were a couple of things I wanted to accomplish, and one was to stay at home a little more, relax and really hit the songwriting hard," he elaborates. "And release and get this record out. And I feel like at that point, artistically, I'll be able to move forward and start setting my sights on what's next."

That may mean more writing. Songwriting is what Josh originally came to Nashville to do and, in fact, he has had a bit of good luck with



(Right) Josh surprised fans when he debuted a new look, chopping his signature long curls last year; (below) Josh gets down to business in the studio.



other artists recording songs he has written—including Joe Nichols' latest single, "Freaks Like Me." He grins and says, "I've had the top artists cut my songs and it's been great. I love that. I'll never not love that. To me, it doesn't matter who I'm writing for, all I want to do is write a great song. I literally just set out to sit down and write the best song I possibly can and then I'll figure out where it's going after that."

Josh seizes the opportunity to make a tongue-in-cheek comparison: "I moved here to town with the intention of attempting to be a song factory and writing my own records and cutting some great outside songs and getting my songs on other records." He stifles a laugh, then continues, "Think of my catalog as an orphanage and you just want to find them all a good home. You can't take every single one of them home with you—although you want to, you can't raise all those babies. But

when you find them all a good home, you still feel like a good parent."

Even so, Josh isn't watching Music Row's tip sheets in hopes of writing the perfect Keith Urban hit. He just writes what he's feeling and hopes someone else relates. "I've attempted to write specifically for another artist who is looking for exactly this," he explains. "That never works for me. I don't know why, but I can't assignment-write. Not even for myself. I have ideas and I know how I want them to go and where I want them to go and how I want the music to sound, but still at the end of the day if I set out saying, 'This is for so-and-so,' it kind of puts a damper on it. It kind of takes a little soul out of it."

Knowing that Josh will be maintaining his active writing schedule, it's hard not to wonder if he'll ever get around to recording any of those songs for a new album, one that hasn't been locked away for a few years. Even he isn't completely sure. "I don't know

what my next move is. I would love to make another record," he admits. "I would love to make a different kind of record altogether. I probably will always make records. After the first of the year I'll start putting my focus into what I want that record to sound like and start working on it. I'm trying to write for everybody, including myself."

There's a light, playful sense of humor to Josh, who sips from a nearby bottle of water in between his deadpan jokes. Considering that his journey thus far has been far from perfect, he admits that he's had bouts of unhappiness. Lately, though, he's on an upswing. "For the first time in a long time, I'm happier than I've been in a long while," he says. "I needed a slight veer. I needed a little change of pace and I've gotten it, and it's been fulfilling and it's been rewarding. And it's been good for me."

Perhaps it's fair to say that the third time's the charm for Josh's first second album. **N**

Branch President

DUANE ALLEN OF THE OAK RIDGE BOYS HELPS RUN THE BAND'S BUSINESS RIGHT DOWN TO THEIR TOUR ITINERARY, IN PART TWO OF OUR FOUR-PART SERIES ON THE OAKS.

STORY BY BOB PAXMAN

The Oak Ridge Boys—Duane Allen, Joe Bonsall, William Lee Golden and Richard Sterban—represent four distinct personalities who have managed to blend together as one unified quartet for more than 40 years. Perhaps one reason for their longevity is that all four enjoy their own personal hobby that keeps them occupied and fulfilled when they're not on the road or making music in the studio.

As The Oaks prepare to enter the Country Music Hall of Fame on Oct. 25, *Nash Country Weekly* will profile each member and his own unique hobby for a special four-part series. In this issue, Duane Allen, who became a member of the group in 1966 when the original Oak Ridge Boys still sang gospel music, outlines his role as Oaks' president and unofficial overseer of the business model.

Unlike his three Oak Ridge Boys counterparts, Duane pursues a pastime that has everything to do with music. Richard loves baseball, Joe writes children's books and chronicles the band's history while William Lee expresses his nonmusical side in his paintings and photographs. But Duane's hobby is, well, The Oak Ridge Boys. Duane helps construct the business model and plan the foursome's tour schedule, while serving as the primary lead vocalist onstage. He's been called the CEO

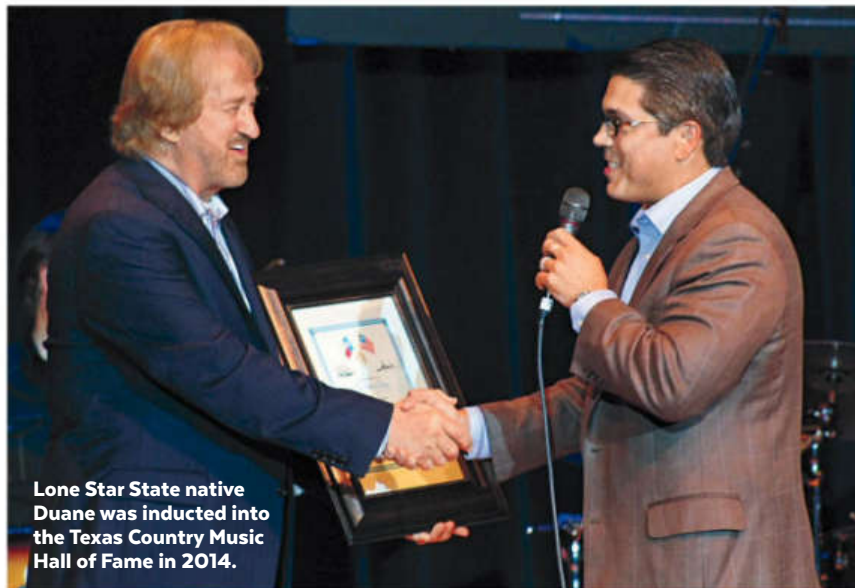
of the group, but Duane has a more precise definition.

"I believe my title is actually President," he says with a smile as he sits behind a desk at The Oak Ridge Boys' office outside Nashville. "My goal is to help us reach an area of income that will be comfortable for all of us and our employees." And Duane has those logistics worked out right down to the season's last tour date.

"We need to work 150 days out of the year," Duane points out with definitive assurance. "At least, that's what it says on my computer. That is how many dates we need to keep everyone happy and in a good financial state." Each year, Duane, who's as tech savvy as any 72-year-old you're

likely to come across, draws up the business model for the group on the computer and works out the tour schedule to get to that magic 150 mark. "There are some years where we have fallen short at first, but then we picked up additional dates," Duane explains. "Other years, we've actually had more than 150 tour dates because of shows that we did not expect to have. It's a good schedule but certainly nothing like we had in our younger days," he adds with a hearty laugh.


It does seem, however, that the Oaks are busier than ever, when you peruse their tour schedule along with their recording commitments. Their current tour



Lone Star State native Duane was inducted into the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame in 2014.

Duane & Chris courtesy Webster PR, Duane by Matt Blair



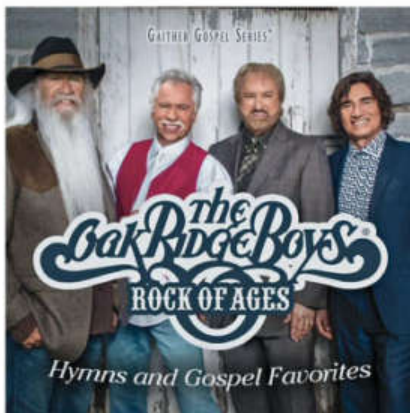
A large photograph of Duane Allen, a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a teal jacket over a black shirt. He is sitting in a black leather office chair at a desk. His laptop has a Texas state flag sticker on the lid. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile.

“As many times as we have sung ‘Elvira’ or ‘Bobbie Sue’ or our other hits, we still make it sound fresh, like it’s the first time we’ve ever done it.”

DUANE ALLEN CONTINUED

keeps the Oaks on the road almost through the end of December, with few breaks in between. They’ll rest long enough to embrace their induction to the Country Music Hall of Fame on Oct. 25.

But for a quartet whose members are now in their 60s and 70s, slowing down does not appear to be an option. Duane notes that each member of the group still has that “little-boy enthusiasm” about music, which partly explains why they continue to be a popular road draw. “The Oak Ridge Boys are still fans of our music industry,” he says, smiling. “We look forward to going into the Nashville publishing offices and finding new songs. We still love to record. And when we walk out onto that stage, we want to be great every single show. As many times as we have sung ‘Elvira’ or ‘Bobbie Sue’ or our other hits,” Duane adds, “we still make it sound fresh, like it’s the first time we’ve ever done it. And that’s a



credit to everyone in the group.”

The members put that youthful enthusiasm into their latest album project, *Rock of Ages: Hymns and Gospel Favorites*, which took the guys back to their gospel and spiritual roots. The album garnered two Gospel Music Association Dove Awards nominations. “We recorded that with some of the best musicians in town,” Duane says. “It is truly a vocal album. We got pretty emotional on some of the songs because they

mean a lot to us. There are a couple of times when you could hear a little emotional crack in Joe’s voice, but we left it in. It was so powerful. We just put our hearts into this album.”

Offstage, Duane keeps the band in the forefront and in the public eye with his extensive use of social media. “We all have a presence there,” Duane says. “We’re active on Facebook. Joe likes to use Twitter and I’m on that a lot as well.” Somehow, Duane finds enough time in the day to spend as much as 10 to 12 hours on his computer, checking chart activity and responding to fans and Facebook posts.

“I retweet all posts,” Duane proudly points out. “And I try to respond as quickly as I can. I feel like that is part of my responsibility. I have kind of a little office set up on the bus where I can look after the business and check our social media pages. It is something that I *want* to do,” Duane adds with emphasis. “It doesn’t feel like a chore to me. I don’t consider any of this to be work.” **NCW**



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A new baby on the way gives the CMA award-nominated Thompson Square a whole new perspective.



photo courtesy BBR Music Group



K

eifer Thompson won't admit to being scared about his wife and singing partner Shawna giving birth to their first child.

"I don't think I am scared," says the

male half of Thompson Square from a bright and cheery tour bus parked outside a dark and sold-out venue in downtown Chicago. "I'm not scared about dirty diapers or anything like that. I'm going to tackle it like everything else I have ever done in my life—get in there and get it done."

Then he takes a breath, signaling that perhaps, deep down, he is a little scared.

"I mean, I'm scared about screwing things up and not doing things right," Keifer continues. "I pray every day that the baby is healthy and happy."

"I'm thinking farther down the road," Shawna interjects. She's sitting across from Keifer with a sign that reads, "The Secret to Having It All Is Knowing That You Already Do" hanging just over her head. "Hopefully we will be able to discipline them the way they need to be. We want to raise a good kid. I'm just looking forward to this next chapter of our lives."

The couple had been contemplating adding to their family for more than a year and a half before finally being able to announce in August that Shawna was pregnant. "[She] and I have been together for so long, so for it not to be just the two of us is going to be an adjustment and a huge change for us from a selfish standpoint because it's not going to be just about us anymore," says Keifer. "We took the road of first getting our career started and thank God we are able to do this for a living because we were able to get our foot in the door and then talk about having kids, rather than the other way around. I think that if we had had a kid early on, we wouldn't be where we are today as far as our career goes."

With No. 1 hits, industry awards and successful tours with sold-out shows, Thompson Square has seen some amazing highs in the last few years. But never in the duo's history have the Thompsons found themselves on the cusp of such a time of dramatic change. In the coming months alone, the CMA Vocal Duo of the Year nominees will wrap up the sale of their house in Alabama, begin renovating their house in Nashville, welcome their baby boy in January 2016 and release their highly anticipated third album soon thereafter.

And about that record—well, the music is poised to undergo change as well.

"We recently did a show with Kristian Bush, and he was telling me that 'your songwriting is going to skyrocket because once you have kids, you don't care about anything except for them,'" says Keifer, who—along with Shawna—has enjoyed No. 1 singles with "Are You Gonna Kiss Me or Not" and "If I Didn't Have You" and a Top 5 hit with "Everything I Shouldn't Be Thinking About." "Basically, you live by the adage that 'I have to provide for these children, so I need to write hit songs about real life.' There are a lot of different flavors, but country music fans still want to hear songs about life and love and good times and hope and failure."

Failure, Kiefer says, was something he felt when their most recent single, "Trans

PARTNERS IN RHYME

Like **THOMPSON SQUARE**, these husband-and-wife country duos kept it in the family.

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Joey Martin Feek and Rory Feek

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THE WRIGHTS

Adam and Shannon Wright

CARL BUTLER AND PEARL

Carl Butler and Pearl Jones

LULU BELLE AND SCOTTY

Myrtle Cooper and Scott Wiseman

JOHNNY AND JONIE MOSBY

O'SHEA
Mark O'Shea and Jay O'Shea

THE STELLAS

Brad and Marylynn Stella

THE WILSONS

Dave and Kortney Wilson



Shawna and Keifer perform at CMA Festival this year and (below) reveal the sex of their baby.

THOMPSON SQUARE CONTINUED

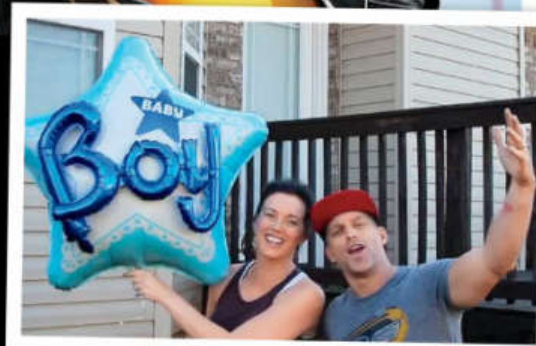
Am,” stalled on the charts before it ever had the chance to get up to speed this summer.

“Live, [“Trans Am”] plays like a huge hit,” says Keifer. “And people were streaming the hell out of it. But it remains a huge question mark for us. I am trying to look at the bright side of everything, so I truly believe there is no success without failure and no failure without success and [the song’s] failure is going to lead to a lot more success for us. I think what it did is that it told us what our fans want from us, and sometimes you have to let go of what you want for you and give them what they want without losing your identity. So, because of that, we have gone back to the woodshed a little bit and it’s been kind of liberating. Our fans want to see our love on stage manifested in the form of music, and that’s what we are going to give them.”

While Keifer concentrates on writing new songs, Shawna thanks her lucky stars that she is feeling healthy and ready to bring a new life into this world. “I feel fantastic,” she says. “I had a bit of nausea but I never threw up. But our shows have certainly changed for me. I mean, I find that I am completely drained and after the show, I am ready for bed pretty much immediately. And of course, I don’t get to do shots with the boys before the show anymore.”

They both laugh.

“She’s eating for two and I’m drinking for two,” Keifer says, chuckling.



Thompson Square will tour through October, and then return to the road come April with a new child-proofed tour bus and a new passenger on board. “Just this morning, I was trying to see if Keifer could feel the baby moving,” Shawna smiles. “Right now, it’s really more like a fluttering feeling, but man, I wish Keifer could feel it.”

He’s feeling *something*, for sure.

“There is definitely a gentleness that has come out of him that has been very sweet,” she says quietly. “It got me excited to see him so excited about making our registry for our shower and get all wound up about the little clothes and shoes.”

She stops for a moment, and looks over at Keifer.

“It’s not that he wasn’t gentle and loving before, but it’s just different,” she says. “Everything feels different.”

Different can certainly be a scary prospect, but at least Thompson Square will be greeting it together. **NCW**

Sunny Day Driver

**CRUISE THE BACK ROADS OF TENNESSEE
IN MITCHELL TENPENNY'S
NEW MUSIC VIDEO.**

ART IMITATES LIFE in Mitchell Tenpenny's video for "Love and Rock 'n' Roll." Not only visually, as Mitchell and actress Ellie Ottaway cruise down the winding country back roads of Waverly, Tenn., but also in the song's lyrics.

"The message of the song came from me taking a road trip with a special person in my life and I looked over and realized I had so much to live for sitting next to me in the passenger seat," Mitchell tells *Nash Country Weekly*. "I wanted to write a song about just driving and listening to the radio with the girl of your dreams."

Ellie, the video's romantic lead, may be an actress, but the fun interaction between the two as they cruised the two-lane was real. "She was incredible the entire time! Obviously, she's gorgeous, so she makes it very easy to watch the video," Mitchell says. "She is a true professional and I feel very blessed

she was part of the project. She was so easy to work with and I think that speaks a lot about her character. She's a genuinely great person."

Co-written with his buddy Brad Clawson, "Love and Rock 'n' Roll" is the third release from Mitchell's *Black Crow* album. The country singer/songwriter has quite a different approach to releasing singles than is typical in Nashville's country music machine. Instead of running songs up the radio charts, he's trying to make a connection to fans. "I'm just trying to get as much music as I can out to listeners so they can become familiar with who I am," he explains. "If they like what they hear, they might come back for more."

It's too soon for Mitchell to choose his next single from *Black Crow*, so in the meantime, put the top down, turn the radio up and enjoy a little "Love and Rock 'n' Roll."

TAMMY RAGUSA



Mitchell and Ellie take a leisurely afternoon drive . . . under the watchful eye of a video crew.



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SACRED GROUND



A look back at 90 years of country's longest running program, the Grand Ole Opry.

STORY BY CRAIG SHELBURNE

On any given night at the Grand Ole Opry, you will hear songs about love and loss, patriotism and family pride, maybe even “Rocky Top” or “Rose Colored Glasses.”

The Opry crowd on October 3, 2014, was enjoying Little Big Town’s catchy number about mmm-motorboatin’ when an unexpected singer added her voice to “Pontoon.” All four members—Karen Fairchild, Jimi Westbrook, Kimberly Schlapman and Phillip Sweet—heard the unfamiliar harmony part, but none of them could figure out what was going on.

“We were looking around. Then out of our left eye marches Reba

onstage,” recalls Kimberly. All four bandmates were shocked. Then, when the superstar invited them to join the Grand Ole Opry, they freaked out.

“Karen said—and she was so right—it was like that moment when the girl has been praying for the man to drop to his knees and ask her to marry him,” Kimberly adds. “That is what that felt like! We got butterflies and we went kind of crazy, embarrassing-

ly crazy. I still feel it right now—I feel that surge of my heart right now as I think back on it.”

Jimi adds, “You feel it when you walk in the halls of that place. It has a unique feeling and unless you walk back there, you don’t really know what I’m talking about, but to look at the pictures and feel the atmosphere that’s in the building, it’s something to treasure.”

First Transmissions

The Opry’s modest beginnings can be traced to November 28, 1925, in the WSM studios in downtown Nashville when 77-year-old fiddler Jimmy Thompson played some tunes on the air. That Saturday night broadcast elicited enormous listener response, so station director George D. Hay—known as the Solemn Old Judge—decided to add a live show of country and folk performers to the schedule permanently. Indeed, the Grand Ole Opry is still broadcast on WSM, making it the longest-lived radio show in the nation.

In the 1930s, country stars like Roy Acuff and Bill Monroe signed up and remained a vital part for six decades. The show settled at the Ryman Auditorium in 1943 after being staged at various venues around town, with artists like Hank Williams, Patsy Cline and Jim Reeves join-



(Clockwise from above) Little Big Town was invited to join the Opry in 2014; Roy Acuff (center) and band at WSM’s studio; “Solemn Old Judge” George D. Hay (left) and “Uncle” Jimmy Thompson at the first WSM Barn Dance—renamed the Grand Ole Opry in late 1927.



GRAND OLE OPRY CONTINUED

ing the fold in years to come. In 1963, a weekly live broadcast from the WSM studios called the *Friday Night Frolics* moved into the Ryman and was rebranded as *The Friday Night Opry*.

That same year, a young woman named Connie Smith was singing in a talent show in Ohio. She won five silver dollars, but more importantly, she got the chance to meet Opry star Bill Anderson. They stayed in touch and he encouraged her to record some demos in Nashville. In the summer of 1964, she signed a contract with RCA, recorded "Once a Day" (which Bill wrote) and released it to country radio. By the end of the year it climbed to No. 1—the first debut single by a female to do that—and stayed there eight weeks. A year later she joined the Opry.

Known as the "Sweetheart of the

Grand Ole Opry," Connie cheerfully recalls the time when Roy Acuff was about to sing "Wabash Cannonball" and the Opry curtain wouldn't rise: "The funny thing of it, Jimmy Dickens and I ran out to hold up the curtain—and we were probably two of the shortest people in the Opry," she says. "It's a good thing it didn't happen to Ernest Tubb, you know?"

Connie is one of the rare members who can recall those Ryman shows before the Grand Ole Opry House opened in 1974. (Jean Shepard, one of Connie's musical heroes, is the longest-serving cast member. She was inducted in 1955.) While Roy Acuff was a vocal supporter of moving the show out to the suburbs to accommodate bigger crowds, others were unsure.

"I had both feelings," Connie admits. "It's just like leaving the old home place that means so much

to you because of all the heritage there, but I also knew it'd be nice to have a place where you could rehearse and have room to sit down somewhere. Now we've been there so long that the new Opry House—we still call it the new Opry House—is very comfortable."

Unbroken Traditions

Prior to the move, a six-foot circle of wood was taken from the stage of the Ryman and incorporated into the center of the Opry House floor. Today it's the signature emblem of the Opry's history. Larry Gatlin and his brothers, Steve and Rudy, were inducted inside of that circle in the Opry House on Christmas Day in 1976. However, asked about their Opry appearances at the Ryman leading up to that night, Larry Gatlin's memories are vivid.

"I'll tell you how it was—it was



(Clockwise from above) Bill Monroe and His Bluegrass Boys, who introduced bluegrass to the world on the Opry stage; Jean Shepard; Patsy Cline; Hank Williams; Jim Reeves



hotter than two rats making love in a wool sock!" he says. "There were no air conditioners in that place. It was like an oven. But there was still Marty Robbins, Dolly Parton, Porter Wagoner and Dottie West. And then coming on out to the river [the new location], and being inducted in '76, is one of the great thrills of my life."

That river is the Cumberland, and in 2010 it devastated the city—and the Opry House in particular. Larry recalls waking up in New York City and seeing a news report on television before realizing that the flood footage was from Nashville. He remembers how Opry management scrambled to find alternate venues, including a church and a college auditorium, so the show could go on. An estimated \$20 million was invested into repairs at the Opry House. On September 28, 2010, close friends Brad Paisley and Jimmy Dickens

carefully restored the rescued wooden circle to center stage, ensuring that tradition would never be broken.

"The Opry's going to continue," says Larry, who's been known to play four Opry shows a week since moving back to Nashville from Austin, Texas, about five years ago. "If we did it out on the middle of a hayfield or in the Grand Canyon, it's still going to be the Grand Ole Opry, because it's the people."

Getting the Call

Although country fans can (and will) debate about who should and should not be inducted, the decision rests solely on Opry management. Career accomplishments and commitment are major factors, and so are the relationships that artists have with the Opry and their fans. Darius Rucker and Keith Urban joined in 2012. In 2013, the only honoree was

Old Crow Medicine Show, a string band that harkens back to the earliest days of the Opry.

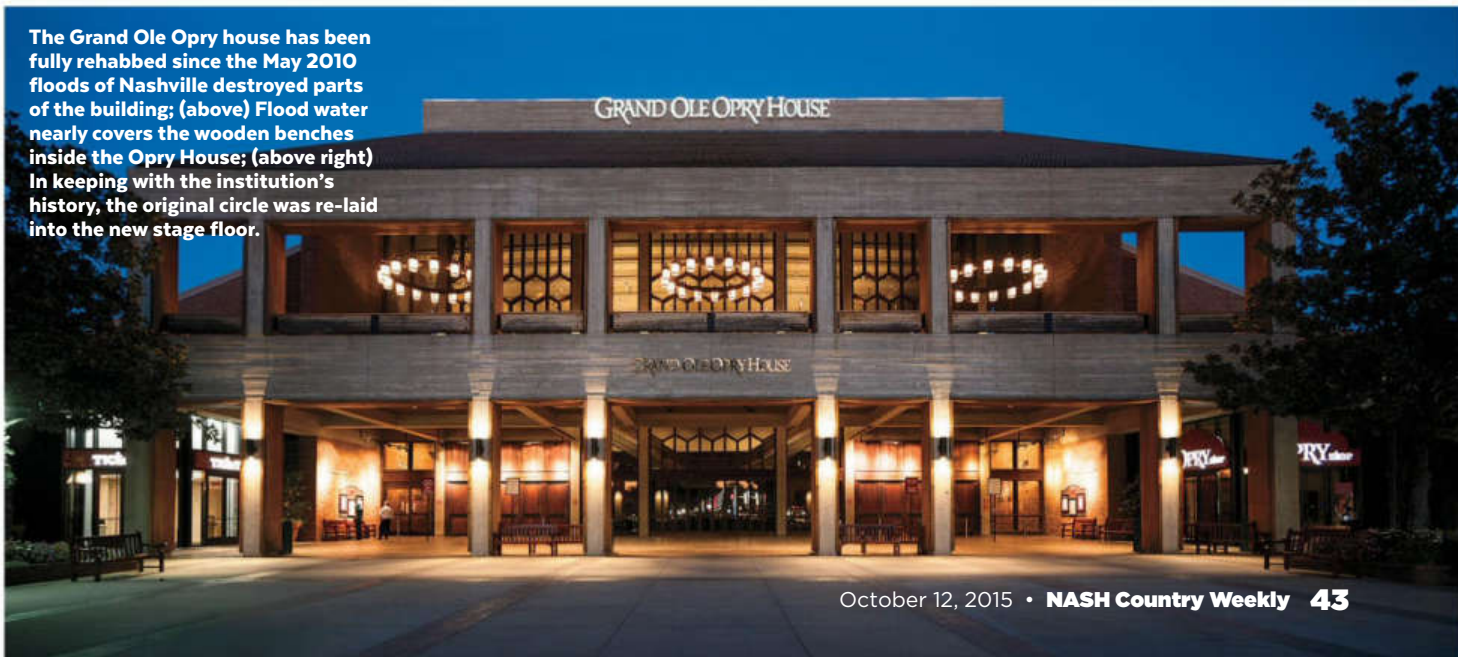
Newer members like Dierks Bentley, Blake Shelton and Josh Turner drop by as often as they can. So do veteran stars like Vince Gill, Ricky Skaggs and Marty Stuart.

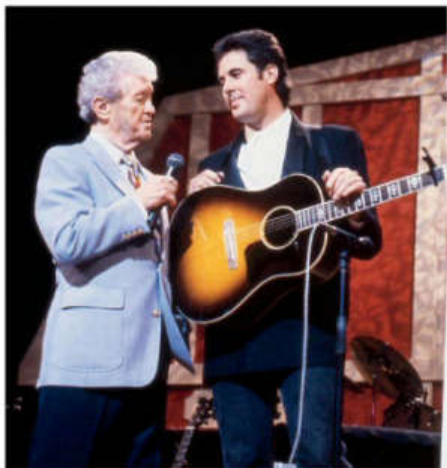
Since joining in 2008, Carrie Underwood has taken her role as an Opry member seriously. She hosts a short film inside the Opry House just before the curtain rises. In July, her in-person appearances prompted four sold-out shows. While there is no longer a fixed number of shows an Opry member must commit to annually, that expectation lingers.

A member since 2008, Craig Morgan marked his 200th appearance on the Grand Ole Opry in July. He grew up in Kingston Springs, Tenn., not far from Nashville. His father was a bass player, so Craig



The Grand Ole Opry house has been fully rehabbed since the May 2010 floods of Nashville destroyed parts of the building; (above) Flood water nearly covers the wooden benches inside the Opry House; (above right) In keeping with the institution's history, the original circle was re-laid into the new stage floor.





(Clockwise from above) Roy Acuff (left) helps induct Vince Gill into the Opry; Garth Brooks invites Carrie Underwood to join; Darius Rucker joins the family; Pam Tillis with her father, Opry legend Mel Tillis; Keith Urban accepts his invitation to join the Opry; recent inductees Old Crow Medicine Show find their plaque on the wall of members.



GRAND OLE OPRY CONTINUED

encountered country stars on a regular basis, but didn't think much about it. When he was around 11, he sang a solo in his school choir at a Nashville event and received a compliment from none other than Sarah Cannon, better known as Minnie Pearl. She told him that someday he would be a famous singer. On the night when Craig made his Opry debut, he found a picture of Minnie Pearl hanging in his dressing room. He was inducted on October 25, which happened to be the late comedienne's birthday.

Although locals rarely go to the Opry unless company's coming, Craig scoffs at the idea that anyone in Nashville would consider it corny or outdated. Instead, he views the show as historic. "It's not like any place you

can play, strictly because of the history," he says. "Even as a guest early on, you know you're a part of something special. And you feel that."

He also realizes that the Opry has a global presence. "When you go anywhere in the world—and I know this because we were just in France, Norway, Germany, Switzerland and Scotland—and you ask people to say three things that make them think of country music, inevitably the Opry will always be one of those three things. That's how important it is to our format."

The Opry Family

At one of her first Opry appearances, Martina McBride was introduced to the stage by Roy Acuff as "Matilda McBride!" And in 1995, the same year she landed her first No. 1 hit

with "Wild Angels," she was formally inducted by Loretta Lynn during an all-star TV special.

"I always feel like it's a place you can go and pull out a classic and it's going to feel right," she says. "It feels like an artistic stage and a comfortable stage so I don't feel pressured to do anything, really. Sometimes we'll do some classic country, sometimes we'll do something off *Timeless*. Sometimes we'll do brand-new things that we've never played before. Sometimes we'll do an album cut. I always try to mix it up a little bit and do a little bit of everything."

Growing up in Kansas, Martina absorbed her father's deep collection of country music and they performed together in a family band. As an Opry member, she's had the opportunity to bring him onto the famous

Opry members from several generations gathered for "Opry Comes Home," re-opening the stage after the flood.



stage to sing with her.

"I think he probably dreamed of being on the Opry," she says. "To be able to do that for him and put him on the stage at the Opry, it was really special. It was a dream come true for both of us."

Family bonds are unmistakable at the Opry. Mel Tillis and daughter Pam Tillis are both members. Lorrie Morgan, whose father, George, was a member, grew up at the Opry. Jesse McReynolds and Bobby Osborne, who both marked 50 years as members in 2014, represent the bluegrass brother duos Jim & Jesse and The Osborne Brothers.

Of course, bluegrass has long been an essential component of Opry broadcasts. In December 1945, Earl Scruggs made his Opry debut with Bill Monroe and His Blue Grass Boys.

With Monroe on mandolin, Earl on banjo, Lester Flatt on guitar, Chubby Wise on fiddle and Howard Watts on bass, the classic bluegrass lineup—and a new style of music—was born.

Responsibilities

When The Oak Ridge Boys were invited to join in 2011, they had just finished singing "Y'all Come Back Saloon" when Little Jimmy Dickens appeared in a flowing white beard, sunglasses and cowboy hat, looking like a tiny William Lee Golden decked out in rhinestones. Little Jimmy told them that for his whole life, he wanted to be a little Oak Ridge Boy. Then he shocked them with the announcement that they'd be joining the Opry.

"We were laughing so hard at him, we just about missed the invitation," recalls Duane Allen. After taking a

few minutes to regain their composure, the guys joyfully sang "Elvira."

"When you look at the people who are members of the Grand Ole Opry, it's a very special family," says Richard Sterban. "For The Oak Ridge Boys to now be a part of that family, I mean, it's hard to find words to describe how special it is. We're thrilled to be members of the Grand Ole Opry and thrilled to be part of the 90th anniversary."

Little Big Town echoes that sentiment. Phillip Sweet recalls the band's induction night as "a spiritual moment," while Karen Fairchild describes it as "humbling." She adds, "I feel like it's probably the most important thing in our career that's happened. It's such an iconic institution. We do feel like we've got to live up to the moment. It's a big deal." **NCW**

BELLES OF THE BALL

YOUR VOICE WAS HEARD IN OUR ANNUAL POLL OF
COUNTRY MUSIC'S HOTTEST BACHELORETTES.

We put together a list of beautiful, talented and, most importantly, single ladies for our 2015 Hottest Bachelorettes contest and asked you—the fans—to cast your vote. And vote you did. After thousands of ballots were tallied, we have the results in our Top 10 list.

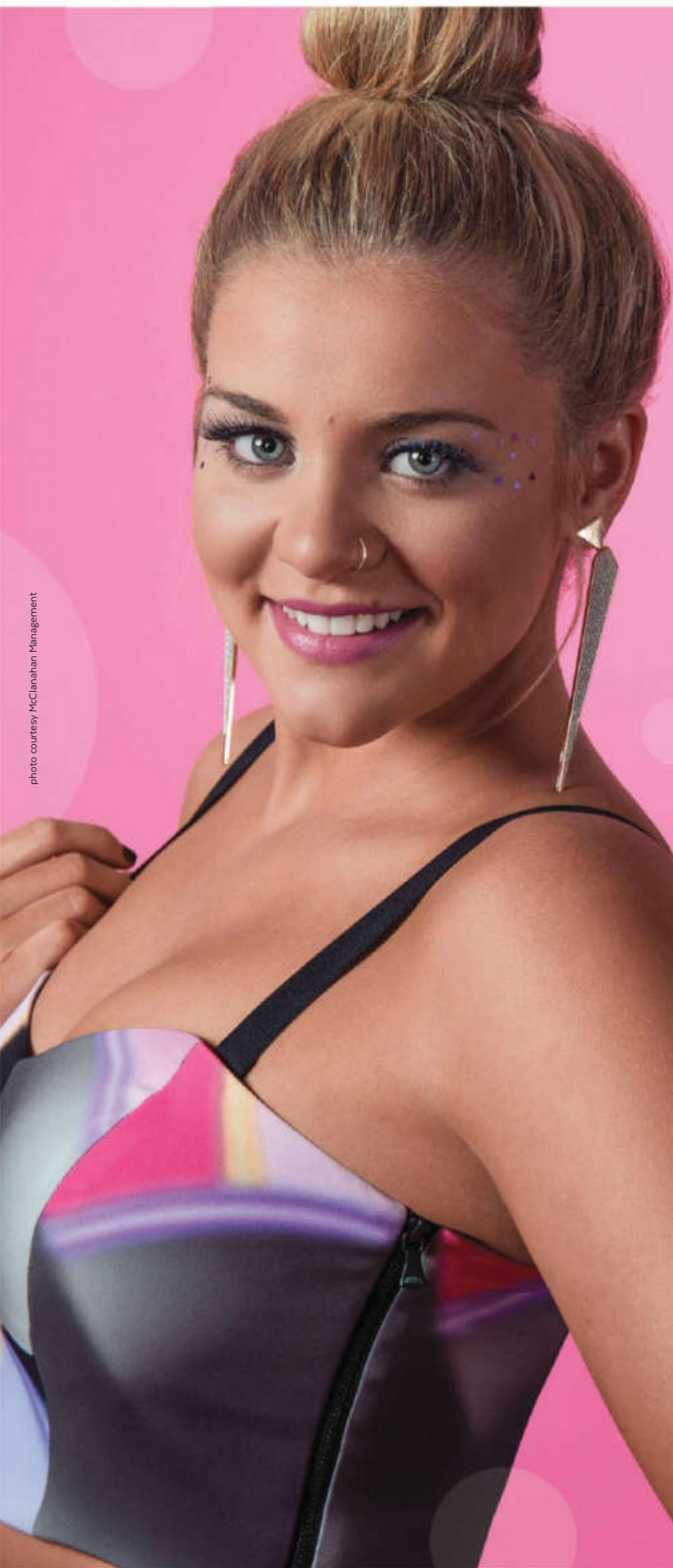


photo courtesy McClanahan Management

1 LAUREN ALAINA

AGE: 20

If you Google the term “Southern belle,” you’ll see a lot of proper ladies in frilly dresses, presumably heading out to important society events. That image sounds nothing at all like Lauren Alaina, and yet the designation nonetheless seems pretty right for her. As *Nash Country Weekly*’s newly named hottest bachelorette, the north Georgia native embodies the ideal but without the historical baggage of socioeconomic class that it implies. In this case, it comes down to the grace with which Lauren carries herself—confident, poised and mature. Lauren is as authentic as they come: those striking, large blue eyes and classical facial features are coupled with a razor-sharp wit and an accent that leaves no doubt about which part of the country she calls home. Where many women fall victim to unhealthy habits in pursuit of toothpick-thin figures, Lauren maintains an active regimen that keeps her body looking toned and her gorgeous skin glowing. Above all else, she doesn’t make apologies for the person she is—what’s hotter than that?



2 DANIELLE BRADBERRY

AGE: 19

Danielle Bradbery is, arguably, country music's new all-American girl, a blue-eyed blonde with a natural sparkle. Her bashful demeanor and sweet vocal tone charmed *The Voice* voters and helped her take home the trophy on Season 4. But remember, with sugar comes spice; this Texas native may be petite and beautiful, but she also has all the swagger of her home state. Danielle has grown up gracefully and beautifully in the spotlight, and is now a bona fide hottie and a genuine star on the rise.

Danielle by Joseph Llanes/BH&L; Cassadee by Brooke Boling/BH&L; Terri courtesy Spalding Entertainment; Lindsay by Jason Myers/BBR Music Group

3 CASSADEE POPE

AGE: 26

Cassadee Pope's kind eyes, sly smile and freckles give her that girl-next-door image that immediately resonates with fans. But there's also that incredible, soaring voice, which can make you fall in love on first listen. Cassadee can look wondrous in a simple shirt-and-jeans combo. But if you've ever spotted her at a red-carpet event, you'll see that she's equally stunning in glamorous gowns and dresses.





4 TERRI CLARK

AGE: 47

Terri Clark is more of a long, cool woman in a black hat than in a black dress, but the long and cool part is dead on. She has legs for days, and an engaging personality that goes from hilariously silly to disarmingly intellectual. To borrow the title from her own No. 1 single, this Canadian songbird is also

“Easy on the Eyes.” Her dark eyes, darker hair and golden complexion give her an almost exotic beauty.

5 LINDSAY ELL

AGE: 26

Lindsay Ell comes closer to owning a rock star persona than any of her female counterparts. She's alternately tough and sweet, with a mane of pretty blond hair and a bit of a rebellious attitude onstage. Plus, she can absolutely shred on guitar with the best of them. Lindsay's the kind of lady you'd love to hang out and have fun with, but you could also bring her home to Mom and she'd fit right in.

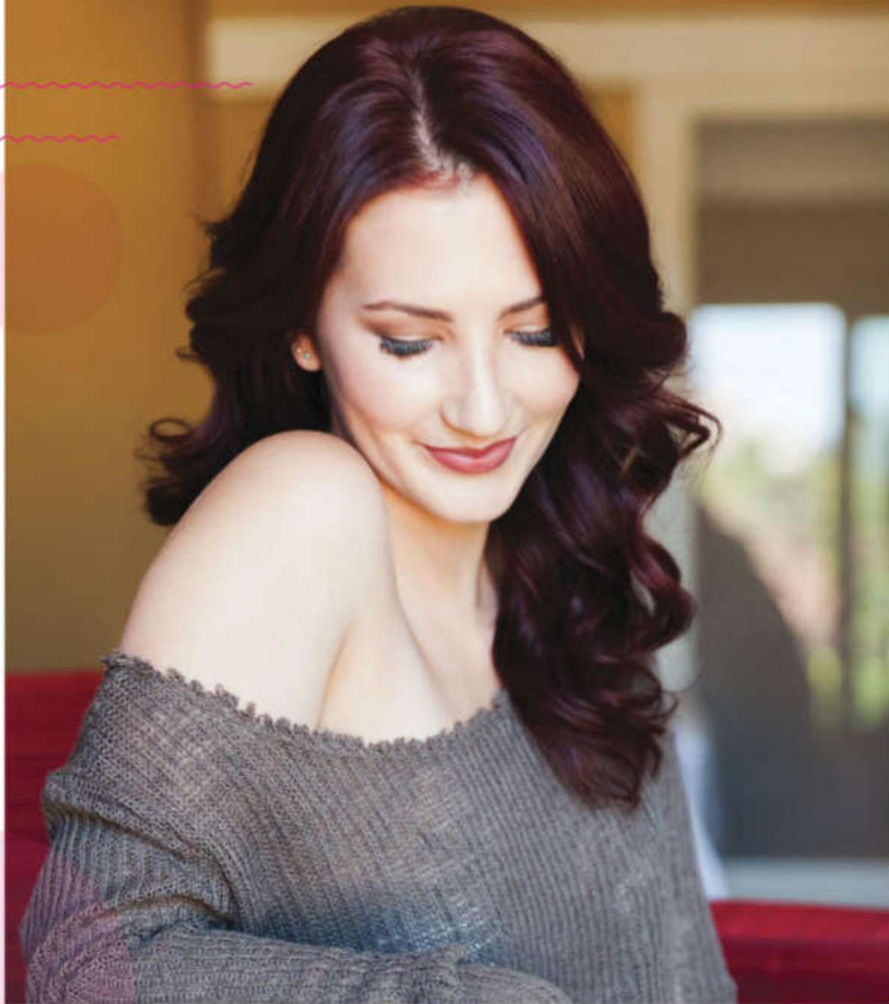


6

KATIE ARMIGER

AGE: 24

Katie Armiger has long been a favorite in our annual poll for her combination of glamorous looks and Texas-bred, down-home appeal. Fans have watched her progression from wide-eyed teenager—she released her debut single, “17 in Abilene,” at age 16—to the young adult showcased in singles like “Better in a Black Dress” and “One Night Among Friends.” She’s maintained the same sweet persona throughout.



KELSEA BALLERINI

AGE: 22

With her blond hair, green eyes and sculpted legs, Kelsea Ballerini cuts an Aphrodite-esque figure onstage, and once her bubbly personality begins to shine through on ultra-catchy songs like “Love Me Like You Mean It” or “Dibs,” you’ll melt in your seat. The heir apparent to Taylor Swift’s abdicated country throne, Kelsea is equal parts poise, talent and beauty.



Katie by Johnny Buzzeno/Cold River Records; Kelsea by Kelly Christine Sutton/Sandbox Entertainment; Raelynn by Joseph Llanes/BMLG; Kristen courtesy C2 Media Relations



8 KACEY MUSGRAVES

AGE: 27

From bouffant hairstyles to flower-child frocks, chameleon-like Kacey Musgraves manages to pull off every one of her chic looks with an aura of confidence that's almost palpable. That Texas-sized self-assurance comes across in the music of the brunette beauty, and with a wry smile and sexy wink, she lets everyone know who's calling the shots.



9 RAELYNN

AGE: 21

Since Raelynn's time on *The Voice*, she's become a bubbly, vivacious, drop-dead-gorgeous young woman whose sassy and spirited personality has also developed a warm maturity. She may have traded her cheerleader-long locks for a sophisticated bob but she's retained her welcoming smile and giggle throughout. And for that, we love her even more.



10 KRISTEN KELLY

AGE: 33

Newly engaged Kristen Kelly will soon be off the market, but until then, feel free to pine over the sultry songbird. The blond-haired, green-eyed temptress knows just the right amount of skin to show off to accentuate her Lone Star State smile and a voice that's as sweet as a Texas mockingbird.

RIDING HIGH

WESTERN STAR **REX ALLEN JR.** CONTINUES TO GIVE FANS NEW MUSIC—THANKS TO TAPES HE DISCOVERED IN HIS GARAGE.



Rex Allen Jr. has been at this entertainment game for around 62 of his 68 years on earth. But ask him if he's ready to hang up his performing hat in exchange for life on the front porch and you'll receive a fairly resounding "no" from the multi-talented singer/actor. "I'm having the best time of my life," he declares. "I don't have to answer to anybody and I can do the music that I want. So, I have no plans to walk away or retire."

Besides, once an entertainer, always an entertainer. Show business is literally in Rex's blood—or more accurately, his bloodline. Rex's dad was the legendary Western film actor and singer Rex Allen, who starred in numerous cowboy flicks and Disney nature movies while scoring several hits on the country charts. From around the age of 6, Rex Jr. traveled with his father on the rodeo circuit

and got an early taste of stardom's perks and glamour.

"He had so many fans," Rex Jr. recalls with a smile that can still be termed "boyish" in its radiance. "Dad would work a rodeo show and sign autographs for about two or three hours. As long as people were in line, Dad would stay and sign for everyone. He always told me that you needed to be nice to the people who support you."

In that spirit, Rex has been giving back to his fans for the last couple of years with new music culled from an unexpected source—his garage. "Around 2012," he begins, "I was getting ready to move and I was going through boxes in my garage that I hadn't opened in probably 20 years. I opened up one and it was full of old demo tapes. They were all on reel-to-reel, that's how old they were."

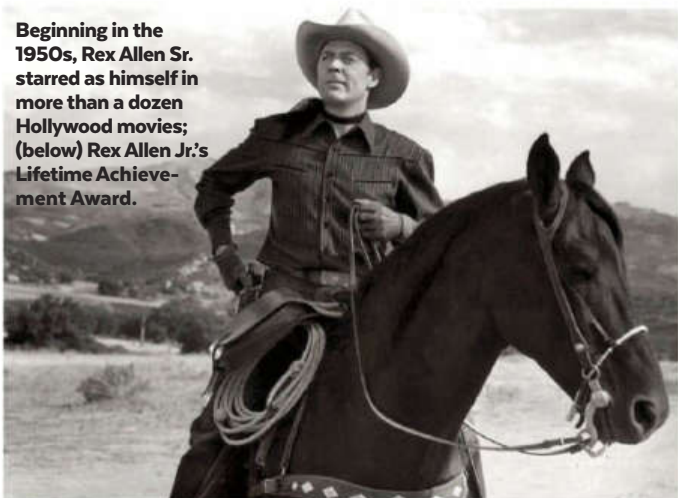
Rex Jr. immediately jumped on his Facebook page and polled his

followers, basically inquiring if they might harbor any interest in these old tunes. The overwhelmingly positive responses provided the answer, but one inherent problem persisted. He couldn't very well release those existing (and certainly out-of-date) tapes in their current condition.

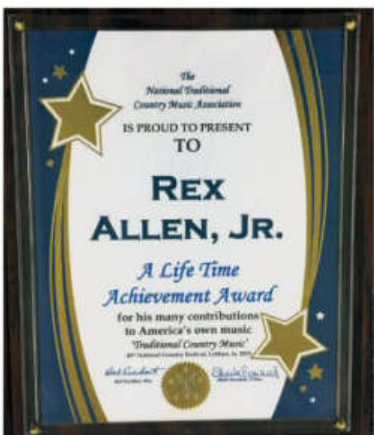
"It's extremely expensive to transfer them over [to CD form]," Rex Jr. explains. "So I decided that I would just recut all the songs on the tapes." Rex never had to leave the house to record, tracking all his vocals right in his own home studio. Once he finished cutting, he released the first in a series of what he lovingly calls "Garage Songs" to online outlets such as iTunes and Amazon. The latest in the collection, *Garage Songs VI: Love Songs*, hit retail on Valentine's Day of this year. He's currently at work on No. 7.

"My goal is to do a minimum of

Beginning in the 1950s, Rex Allen Sr. starred as himself in more than a dozen Hollywood movies; (below) Rex Allen Jr.'s Lifetime Achievement Award.



(Above) Rex Allen (left) and Rex Jr. share a laugh on the range; (right) Rex Jr. performing; (below) Rex Allen Sr. greets a young fan during his cowboy-star heyday.



"I don't have to answer to anybody and I can do the music that I want to. So, I have no plans to walk away or retire."

two albums a year," Rex Jr. says. "It's been wonderful therapy and a way to revisit my musical heritage. These are the songs I grew up with. And these songs have never been on any other of my albums." For sheer variety, it's hard to beat the *Garage Songs* series. Just for example, the *Love Songs* CD traverses a span of musical territory from "Cry Me a River" and "Since I Fell for You" to rock band Foreigner's "I Want to Know What Love Is." The fifth volume covered Western tunes, country classics and pop favorites.

Rex Jr. enjoyed his own catalog of hits during the 1970s and '80s, including Top 10 hits like "Two Less

Lonely People" and "Me and My Broken Heart." He was a featured performer on TNN's highly-rated *The Statler Brothers Show*, where he sang vintage pop and country tunes on the show's Yesteryear segment. And as Rex likes to recall, his encyclopedic knowledge of all musical forms wowed Statler Brothers' vocalists Harold and Don Reid, the co-creators of the show. "They came to me one time and said that they'd thrown every obscure song they could think of at me, and they couldn't stump me," Rex Jr. says, smiling. "How did I know all those songs? Because I listened to everything, and I still do."

Over the years, Rex Jr. has been

honored with induction into the Western Music Association Hall of Fame in 2008 and, this past September, with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Traditional Country Music Association. From Oct. 1-4, he'll celebrate his father's entertainment legacy at the annual Rex Allen Days festival in Willcox, Ariz.

Following that event, Rex Jr. resumes his touring schedule, which he notes is manageable enough to keep him busy. "It's something that I still want to do," he says, before pausing for a smile. "And it's nice to still be able to do it."

BOB PAXMAN



BREAKING GOOD



(From left) Trevor Rosen, Matthew Ramsey, Whit Sellers, Geoff Sprung and Brad Tursi

NOT ONLY DOES SOUNDCHECK allow touring artists the chance to dial in their volume levels for the night's big show, but it's also a place where the creative juices can start flowing. Old Dominion recently found that out. By the time they wrapped a recent soundcheck, the five members—Matthew Ramsey, Trevor Rosen, Whit Sellers, Geoff Sprung and Brad Tursi—had sketched out an idea for a song. They liked it so much that they decided to record their soundcheck that afternoon so they wouldn't lose what they started.

"After that day at soundcheck, we just kept building on what we had," recalls lead vocalist Matthew.

Following their gig that night, everyone piled into the van, en route to the next city on the tour schedule. While some of

the guys were sleeping, Matthew's mind was still turning over their new song-in-progress. "All of a sudden it hit me," he says. "I had this idea for a one-sided-phone-conversation kind of a song."

Trevor was still awake, so the two quietly began to work on the song while it was still fresh in their minds. "I was just whispering into my phone so I wouldn't wake everyone up while Trevor was strumming on the guitar," Matthew explains. "I whispered, 'Hey girl, what's up? I know it's late but I knew you'd pick it up.' Something about me whispering kind of set the tone and the mood for that song."

The next day, Matthew and Trevor shared their tweaks to the song with the rest of the band, which only

"BREAK UP WITH HIM"

OLD DOMINION

WRITERS: Matthew Ramsey, Trevor Rosen, Whit Sellers, Geoff Sprung, Brad Tursi



TOP CUTS

In addition to writing every song on their upcoming *Meat and Candy* album, set for release November 6, the members of **OLD DOMINION** have also been testing the waters with outside cuts. This year, **MATTHEW RAMSEY** scored a No. 1 hit with Dierks Bentley's "Say You Do," while **BRAD TURSI** notched a No. 1 song with Tyler Farr's "A Guy Walks Into a Bar."

fueled everyone's fire to continue working on "Break Up With Him." "We literally kept writing it on the way to gigs, and we worked on it at rehearsals," notes Matthew. "We just really chipped away at it and finally got this song."

"Break Up With Him" was released as the lead single from Old Dominion's forthcoming debut album, *Meat and Candy*, and in just a matter of weeks it became the band's very first Top 15 hit. "It's neat to have that magic dust on it that seems to be taking it further up the charts every week," Matthew says. "It's been really fun for us."

"Usually you're in a room, and you just kind of bang a song out in a few hours or whatever," adds Brad. "This one just kind of went on, and I'm so thankful we stuck with it. It was pretty cool. It was very special for all of us."

ALANNA CONAWAY

The week of Oct. 3, 2015

TOP 25 BILLBOARD ALBUMS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	–	ILLINOIS BRETT ELDREDGE
2	1	KILL THE LIGHTS LUKE BRYAN
3	2	MONTEVALLO SAM HUNT
4	4	JEKYLL + HYDE ZAC BROWN BAND
5	5	THE OUTSIDERS ERIC CHURCH
6	8	ANYTHING GOES FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
7	3	START HERE MADDIE & TAE
8	9	PAIN KILLER LITTLE BIG TOWN
9	10	ANGELS AND ALCOHOL ALAN JACKSON
10	12	OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT JASON ALDEAN
11	11	JUST AS I AM BRANTLEY GILBERT
12	7	WILD ONES KIP MOORE
13	17	PAGEANT MATERIAL KACEY MUSGRAVES
14	13	TRAVELLER CHRIS STAPLETON
15	14	NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL COUNTRY, VOLUME 8 • VARIOUS ARTISTS
16	6	ELVIS FOREVER ELVIS PRESLEY
17	19	GREATEST HITS SO FAR ... ZAC BROWN BAND
18	18	SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE JASON ISBELL
19	20	IGNITE THE NIGHT CHASE RICE
20	24	THE FIRST TIME KELSEA BALLERINI
21	23	DJANGO AND JIMMIE WILLIE NELSON & MERLE HAGGARD
22	22	COLE SWINDELL COLE SWINDELL
23	25	GREATEST HITS: DECADE #1 CARRIE UNDERWOOD
24	21	SOUTHERN STYLE DARIUS RUCKER
25	15	MUD DIGGER, VOLUME 6 VARIOUS ARTISTS

TOP 25 BILLBOARD SINGLES

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	4	SAVE IT FOR A RAINY DAY KENNY CHESNEY
2	2	JOHN COUGAR, JOHN DEERE, JOHN 3:16 • KEITH URBAN
3	3	BUY ME A BOAT CHRIS JANSON
4	5	LOSE MY MIND BRETT ELDREDGE
5	1	CRASH AND BURN THOMAS RHETT
6	8	STRIP IT DOWN LUKE BRYAN
7	9	ANYTHING GOES FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
8	11	GONNA WANNA TONIGHT CHASE RICE
9	14	SMOKE BREAK CARRIE UNDERWOOD
10	10	FLY MADDIE & TAE
11	12	BREAK UP WITH HIM OLD DOMINION
12	13	LET ME SEE YA GIRL COLE SWINDELL
13	15	NOTHIN' LIKE YOU DAN + SHAY
14	16	GONNA BLAKE SHELTON
15	20	I'M COMIN' OVER CHRIS YOUNG
16	17	LONG STRETCH OF LOVE LADY ANTEBELLUM
17	18	REAL LIFE JAKE OWEN
18	21	TOP OF THE WORLD TIM MCGRAW
19	19	BURNING HOUSE CAM
20	22	GONNA KNOW WE WERE HERE JASON ALDEAN
21	24	STAY A LITTLE LONGER BROTHERS OSBORNE
22	23	RUN AWAY WITH YOU BIG & RICH
23	25	ALREADY CALLIN' YOU MINE PARMALEE
24	26	DIBS KELSEA BALLERINI
25	27	I LOVE THIS LIFE LOCASH

TOP 10 AMERICANA AIRPLAY

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	SOMETHING MORE THAN FREE JASON ISBELL
2	2	PAGEANT MATERIAL KACEY MUSGRAVES
3	13	SERVANT OF LOVE PATTY GRIFFIN
4	6	LOST TIME DAVE ALVIN & PHIL ALVIN
5	3	WATKINS FAMILY HOUR WATKINS FAMILY HOUR
6	5	THE BLADE ASHLEY MONROE
7	4	DIDN'T IT RAIN AMY HELM
8	7	BITTERSWEET KASEY CHAMBERS
9	8	ASHES & DUST WARREN HAYNES FEAT. RAILROAD EARTH
10	9	CALL ME INSANE DALE WATSON

SOURCE: AMERICANA AIRPLAY CHART

rdio TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY SONGS*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	CRUISE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
2	BURNING HOUSE CAM
3	YOU CAN'T STOP ME BRETT ELDREDGE FEAT. THOMAS RHETT
4	STRIP IT DOWN LUKE BRYAN
5	TAKE YOUR TIME SAM HUNT

TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY/AMERICANA/SOUTHERN ALBUMS*

TW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	ILLINOIS BRETT ELDREDGE
2	PICKING UP THE PIECES JEWEL
3	NASHVILLE OBSOLETE DAVE RAWLINGS MACHINE
4	NUMBER ONES KENNY ROGERS
5	AND THE WAR CAME SHAKY GRAVES

*DATA FROM SEPT. 21, 2015

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LYNN MORRISON
CAROLTON, GA.

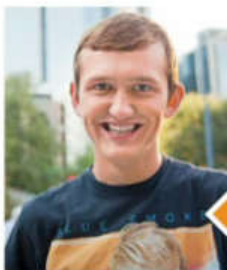


Red-dirt roads!

LIDDY CAWTHON
SAVANNAH, GA.

What country means to me is Dolly Parton. And what's so incredible about Dolly Parton is that she is so fake, but she is so real.

NIBBY PRIEST
HENDERSON, KY.



Country to me is faith, good music and good times.

RANDALL SHULAR
SEVIERVILLE, TENN.



A GOOD TIME!

KATIE BOECKER
MOORHEAD, MINN.



It's pretty much my heart and soul—everything it means to me. I've been a country fan since I was a little bitty girl.

JENNIFER SHULZ
(WITH DAUGHTER GRACIE)
SPRINGFIELD, MO.



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WORDSEARCH

Compiled by John Reiman

OAK RIDGE BOYS

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R O L H B M E J O A O C R L U Q R O Q M
A V N A T A D J I L Y M Y E S N A M B P
N E E N R C A D U L H A I P E A M E P E
D A L K A M M O O C T V N S I B M O J H
O W L G E T N J Y O I O G O B R Y N T G
L A A O H O A V O M W C T G B E S I T I
E R E D E P C K T E E A O N O T G N H H
O D N F H V I C E B F L L R B S N L I W
P S A O T O R J U A I G O E F D I O S O
R E U R M C E O R C L R V H A R H V C H
Y G D K O A M E T K Y O E T N A T E R R
A A Q I R L A B E S M U T U C H E S A E
D F K D F G R O B A E P W O Y C L O Z T
Y O B S D R I N L L K M O S F I T N Y T
R K X D X O V S L O A Q W J R R T G L A
E C J F H U L A I O M P O J E L I A O M
V O P F N P E L C N E V M U E S L V V O
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LOVE SONG

MAKE MY LIFE WITH YOU

NO MATTER HOW HIGH

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ROCK OF AGES

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THIS CRAZY LOVE

TRYING TO LOVE TWO WOMEN

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COUNTRY FOR LIFE™



"We have Merle Haggard on our new gospel album [*Rock of Ages*] with the song 'Sweet Jesus,' which Merle wrote. I told him that we were recording the song but I didn't think I could do the recitation part justice. I asked him if he would consider doing that for us. It was such an honor to work with Merle. All of us know everything he's ever written and sung."

DUANE ALLEN

SEXY MAN Now that the voting is underway for our 2015 Sexiest Man in Country Music contest, it's time to see if anyone can unseat last year's Top 5. BE SURE TO VOTE, AND THEN CHECK THE RESULTS IN OUR NOV. 16 ISSUE!



MOORE FACE-OFF

KIP MOORE	NAME	JUSTIN MOORE
35	AGE	31
SINGLE	STATUS	MARRIED
GEORGIA	HOME STATE	ARKANSAS
2	STUDIO ALBUMS	3
0	BILLBOARD NO. 1 ALBUMS	2
1	BILLBOARD NO. 1 SONGS	4
BALL CAP	HAT	COWBOY

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KRISTEN KELLY
KACEY MUSGRAVES
KATIE ARMIGER
DANIELLE BRADBERRY



LAUREN ALAINA



KELSEA BALLERINI

GRANT LAND

VINCE GILL's middle name is Grant. Coincidentally, Vince married **AMY GRANT** in 2000. Together, they have one daughter, Corrina Grant Gill, born in 2001.



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- Jana Kramer

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